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By Rowland E. Robinson

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HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & COMPANY,
BOSTON AND NEW YORK.

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AND OTHER STORIES**

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BY
ROWLAND E. ROBINSON



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY

The Riverside Press, Cambridge

1905

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OUT OF BONDAGE

I

FRIEND LEMUEL VARNEY urged his well-conditioned but tired mare along the highway with a more impatient voice than he was wont to use ; for the track was heavy with the deep, unbeaten snow of a recent storm, and Lemuel was in a hurry to deliver an article of value which had been intrusted to his care. Except that the article was somewhat bulky, nothing could have been guessed of its character from the irregular rounded form vaguely shown by the buffalo skin which covered it and the legs of the driver, — and for the latter it left none too much room in the ample bread-tray-shaped body of the sleigh. The high back of this conveyance hid from rearward observation all the contents except Lemuel's head, over which was drawn, for the protection of his ears, a knit woolen cap of un-Quakerly red, — a flagrant breach of discipline which was atoned for by the broad brim and the hard discomfort of the drab beaver hat which surmounted and overshadowed it.

The light of the brief winter day, further abbreviated by a cloudy sky, was fading, and the pallid dusk of the longer night was creeping over the

landscape, blurring the crests of woodlands against the sky, blending their nearer borders with the dimmed whiteness of the fields, and turning stacks, barns, and isolated groups of trees to vague, undistinguishable blots upon the fields, whose fences trailed away into obscurity.

Friend Lemuel carefully scanned the wayside for landmarks by which to note his progress, but looked more anxiously behind when the jingle of sleigh-bells approaching from that direction struck his ear. It was a pleasant and cheerful discord of high and low pitched tones of Boston bells, but it seemed to have a disquieting effect upon his accustomed placidity.

"There comes the stage, sure enough. I did hope I could git tu where we turn off tu Zeb'lon's afore it come along," he said, with some show of irritation, and not quite as if speaking to himself or to the mare, which he now addressed as he vigorously shook the reins: "Do git up, thee jade, why don't thee? I say for it, if I had a whip, I should be almost tempted tu snap it at thee. But I know thee's tired, poor creatur', and I had n't ort tu blame thee, if I be tried."

In response to the threat or the expression of sympathy the mare mended her pace, as Lemuel cast another glance behind and saw the stage and its four horses, vaguely defined, moving briskly down the descending road. He slightly raised the

edge of the buffalo, and, bending toward it, said in a low voice, "Thee 'd better fill thyself up with fresh air as quick as thee can, for the stage is comin', and I shall have tu cover thee pretty clust till it gits past."

There was a slight movement under the robe, but nothing became visible except some quickly recurring puffs of vapor steaming out upon the cold air. After a moment Lemuel replaced the robe and gave it a cautionary pat. "Now thee must keep clust, for there's no tellin' who may be a-lookin' at us out o' that stage."

The stage-sleigh, roofed and curtained, was close behind him, the muffled driver shouting imperative orders to the private conveyance to get out of the road. Lemuel pulled his mare out of the track at some risk of a capsize, for the packing of successive snowfalls had raised the beaten path considerably above the general level of the road.

"Git aout o' the road, ol' stick-in-the-mud!" the driver called, as his horses came to a walk and the merry jangle of the bells fell to a soberer chime.

"Thee'll hafter give me a little time," Lemuel urged mildly; "it's consid'able sidelin', an' I dare say, if thee had a bag of pertaters in thy sleigh, thee would n't want 'em upsot in the snow, this cold night."

"Oh, blast your 'taters!" the other said. "What's 'taters compared tu the United States

mail I've got under my laigs?" And then, in better humor as the bread-tray sleigh, after a ponderous tilt, regained its equilibrium, "There, I c'n git by naow, if ye'll take off your hat an' turn it up aidgeways. Say," continuing his banter in a tone intended only for the Quaker's ear, as he leaned toward him from his lofty perch and cast a scrutinizing glance upon the sleigh, "your 'taters hain't Niggertoes, be they?"

Lemuel gave an involuntary upward look of surprise, but answered quietly, as the driver touched the leaders with his long lash and the heavy passenger sleigh swept past, "No; Long Johns."

He was chuckling inwardly at the hidden meaning of his ready answer as the mare climbed the bank to regain the track at a steeper place than she had left it, when the lurching sleigh lost its balance and turned over upon its side, tumbling out all its contents into the snow. Lemuel was upon his feet almost instantly, holding up the frightened mare with a steady hand and soothing her with a gentle voice, while the buffalo robe seemed imbued with sudden life, tossing and heaving in strange commotion as a smothered, alarmed voice issued from it: "'Fore de Lawd, marse, is we done busted?" and then the voice broke in a racking cough.

"Keep quiet, John," Friend Lemuel said in a low tone, "an' git behind the sleigh as quick as thee can. The stage hain't out o' sight." As he righted

the sleigh, a tall, stalwart negro, creeping from under the robe, took shelter behind the high back till the path was regained, and then resumed his place and was again covered by the robe.

"'Fore de Lawd, Marse Varney," he whispered hoarsely, venturing his head a little above the robe, "I was dat skeered I 's jus' shook to pieces."

"John," exclaimed Lemuel with severity, "thee must n't call me or any other man 'master,' as I've told thee more than once. I am thy friend and brother, and thee must n't call me anything else."

"'Pears like I could n't get useter dat away, no-how, Marse Frien' Varney."

"But thee will," said Lemuel decidedly, "when thee gets used tu the fact that thee is thy own master, with no one over thee but thy Heavenly Father, the Lord and Master of the highest and the lowest of mortals. Now take a doste of this hive surrup an' cover up thy head, for this cold air won't help thy cough a mite." So saying, he drew forth a vial from the inner breast pocket of his tight-fitting surtout and held it to the negro's lips, then covered his head carefully, and urged forward the tired mare.

II

"What was it you were saying to that old chap about niggahs?" asked a dark, keen-eyed man who shared the box with the stage-driver.

"Niggers? Oh, Niggertoes was what I said," the

driver laughed, and went on to explain: "That 's the name of a kin' o' 'taters they hev raound here. Pooty good kind o' 'taters they be, tew, — good yielders, an' cook up mealy; but some folks spleen agin 'em 'caount o' the' bein' black, but I don't. I've knowed some tol'able dark-complected folks — yes, rael niggers — 'at was pooty good sorter folks."

"Co'se," assented the passenger. "Niggahs are all right in their place. I would n't object to ownin' a hundred likely boys."

"Wal," considered the driver, "I do' know ezackly 'baout ownin' so many folks. One's 'baout all I c'n manage, an' he's gin me consid'able trouble sen I come of age. Ownin' other folks kin' o' goes agin my Yankee grain." Hearing no answer, he recurred to the opening of the conversation: "That was ol' Uncle Lem Varney, an' I was jes' a-jokin' on him a leetle. They say 'at he hes 'dealin's wi' the undergraoun' railroad, an' I was tryin' tu make him think 'at I s'mised he hed a runaway nigger 'n under his buffalo, but I hed n't no sech a idee."

The traveler turned in his seat and looked back interestedly, while the driver continued: —

"I do' know 's I should keer if he hed, fer ker-ryin' that kind o' passengers don't interfere much wi' my business. The' was tew on 'em, though, on my stage las' summer, jest the cutest. One on 'em was as light-complected as what you be, an' a turrible genteel lookin' an' actin' feller, an' he made

b'lieve he was master tu t' other one, which he was so black a coal would make a white mark on him ; an' they rid right along as grand as Cuffy, nob'dy s'pectin' nothin' till a week arter. Then they was arter 'em, hot-foot, f'm away daown tu Virginny ; but Lord ! they was safe beyund Canerdy line days afore."

"And you people gen'ally favor that sort o' thing?" the stranger asked.

"Wal, no, not tu say favor. The gen'al run don't bother 'emselves one way ner t' other, don't help ner hender ; an' then agin, the' 's some 'at 's mean 'nough tu du anythin' fer pay."

"And they help the niggahs?" suggested the traveler.

"Bless ye, no. They help the ketchers ; the' hain't no money in helpin' niggers."

The other only said "H-m-m" in a tone that might imply doubt or assent, and seemed inclined to drop the conversation, and the driver, after mentally wondering for some time, commented, "One of them blasted Southerners." The stranger's speech was unfamiliar, softening the *r*'s too much for a Yankee of the Champlain Valley, and not as deliberately twisting the vowels as a Yankee of any sort does, but giving them an illusive turn that type cannot capture, midway between the nasal drawl of the New Englander and the unctuous roll of the New Yorker.

The lights of a little hamlet began to glimmer along the dusky road, and presently the steaming horses were haloed in the broad glare of the tavern barroom and came to a halt before the wide stoop, where the bareheaded landlord and lantern-bearing hostlers bustled forth, with a more leisurely following of loungers, to welcome an arrival that lost nothing in interest or importance through semi-daily occurrence.

The driver threw down the mail-bag, tossed the reins to a hostler, and, clambering from his seat, stamped straightway into the barroom. The landlord opened the door of the coach, and invited the passengers to alight while the horses were changed, — an invitation which was accepted with alacrity by all. He ushered them into the welcome indoor warmth, closed the door behind the last guest, and fell to feeding the fire within the huge box stove with a generous supply of wood. With this clatter and the roar of the opened draught he mingled comments on the weather and words of hospitable intent, and then made the most of the brief time to learn what he might of his guests, whence coming and whither going, according to the custom of landlords in those days, when the country tavern had neither the name nor the register of a hotel.

The outside passenger invited the company to drink at his expense, and every one accepted save a stalwart Washingtonian ; for it was before the days

of prohibition, when many otherwise goodly people drank unadulterated liquor publicly in Vermont inns, without shame or fear of subpœnas. The stranger called for Bourbon, to the bewilderment of Landlord Manum.

"Borebone? That must be some furrin drink, suthin' like Bord O, mebb'y?" he queried, with a puzzled face, half resentful of a joke.

"Never heard of Boobon whiskey, sir, the best whiskey in the wauld, sir?" asked the stranger.

"Wal, if it's good whiskey you want, I've got some Monongerhely 'at's ten year ol' ;" and the stranger accepted the compromise with a look of approval, while each of the others, according to taste or predilection, warmed his interior with Medford, Jamaica, gin, brandy, or wine.

Then the driver began to muffle his head in a voluminous comforter and slowly to draw on his gloves, and when he announced, "Stage ready, gentlemen," there was a general exodus of the company, but the outside passenger did not remount to his place.

"Just chuck me my valise. I reckon I'll stop heah a day or so."

A cylindrical leathern portmanteau, such as was in common use by horseback travelers, was tossed down upon the stoop. The driver tucked himself in, gathered up the reins, cracked his whip, and with a sudden creak the sleigh started on its course

and went jangling away into the dusk. The landlord and the hostlers watched it intently, as if to assure themselves of its actual departure ; then of one accord retreated from the outer chill into the warmth of the barroom. The host helped the guest to rid himself of his overcoat and hung it on a hook, where it impartially covered the last summer's advertisements of the Champlain steamers and of a famous Morgan stallion. The three or four remaining idlers resumed their accustomed places. The hostlers diffused an odor of the stable as they divested themselves of their coats and began their ablutions at the corner sink, where a soiled roller towel and the common comb and brush, attached to a nail by a long string, hung on opposite sides of a corrugated little looking-glass. The landlord closed the draught of the stove, subduing its roar to a whisper, and then blew out one of the lights. The other two seemed to burn more dimly, the smoky atmosphere grew heavier, and the room took on again its wonted air of dull expectancy that rarely received a higher realization than the slightly varied excitements of the stage arrivals.

Having performed all other duties, the landlord, who was also postmaster, now took the mail-bag from the floor, where it had been tossed and had remained an object of secondary interest, carried it into the office adjoining the bar, and began a deliberate sorting of the mail, curiously watched

through the narrow loopholes of the boxes by several of the loungers. The Washingtonian drummed persistently on the window of his box till he was given his copy of the county paper, which he at once began reading, after comfortably seating himself, with legs at full length, on the bunk which was a table by day, a bed by night. Others receiving their papers pocketed them to await more leisurely digestion at home. One who was given an unexpected letter studied the postmark and address a long time, trying to guess from whom it came, and then putting it in his pocket still sat guessing, oblivious of the conversation going on about him.

A traveler who "treated" was one whose acquaintance was worth cultivating by the barroom loungers, and they had already made some progress in that direction when the landlord's announcement of supper dispersed them reluctantly to their own waiting meals, from which they returned as soon as might be, with reinforcements.

The free-handed stranger gave them to understand that he was a Pennsylvanian, making a winter tour of the Northern States and Canada for pleasure and enlargement of information, and he quite won their hearts by his generous praise of their State, its thrift, its Morgan horses, its merino sheep, and especially the bracing subarctic atmosphere, in which all true Vermonters take pride.

The Washingtonian, still sitting on the bunk, was so absorbed in the county paper, read by the light of the small whale-oil lamp, that he took no part in the conversation till he had finished the last item of news and glanced over the probate notices. Then he laid the paper across his outstretched legs and took off his spectacles, but kept both in hand for the contingency of immediate need, as he remarked, with an inclusive glance of the company, "Wal, it does beat all haow they be a-agitatin' slav'ry, an' what efforts they be a-makin' to diabolish it. They 've ben a-hevin' a anti-slav'ry convention up to Montpelier, an' they raised a turrible rookery an' clean broke it up. I jest ben a-readin' a piece abaout it here in the paper."

"Sarved 'em right," declared a big, burly, red-faced fellow who occupied a place by the stove opposite the stranger. "Blast the cussed Aberlitionists; they'd ort tu be 'bleeged tu quit med-dlin' wi' other folks' business."

"Wal, I do' know," said the reader, laying aside the paper and putting his spectacles into his pocket as he swung his legs off the bunk. "It's a free country, an' folks has got a right to tell what they think, an' to argy, an' hev the' argyments met wi' argyments. Rotten aigs hain't argyments, Hiel."

"Good 'nough argyments fer cussed nigger-stealin' Aberlitionists," Hiel declared, "a-interferin' wi' other folks' prop'ty."

"Sho, Hiel, they hain't interferin' wi' nobody's prop'ty. They b'lieve it hain't right to hol' slaves, an' they say so, — that 's all," the other replied.

"Don't they?" Hiel sneered. "They're al'ys a-coaxin' niggers tu run away, an' a-helpin' on 'em steal 'emselves, which is the same as stealin'. Look of ol' Quaker Barclay over here, Jacup Wright. I'll bet he everiges a dozen runaway niggers hid in his haouse ev'y year 'at goes over his head. Damn him! he don't du nothin' else only go tu nigger-huggin' Boberlition meetin's."

"Exceptin' when he 's a-raisin' subscriптиerns to git caows fer folks 'at's lost theirn," said Jacob quietly.

"I never ast him tu raise no 'scriptierns fer me, a caow," said Hiel James quickly.

"He done it jest the same, a-headin' on 't wi' five dollars," Jacob replied.

"Wal, if folks is a mineter gi' me a caow, I hain't fool 'nough tu refuse it," Hiel said, dismissing the subject with a coarse laugh. "Blast the runaway niggers! Let 'em stay where they b'long. I'd livser help ketch 'em an' take 'em back 'an tu help 'em git away."

"Oh, sho, Hiel! No, you would n't nuther, Hiel! That would be pooty mean business fer a V'monter. 'Thain't never ben in their line to send slaves back to the' masters."

During the conversation a stalwart young man

had entered the room, and after including the company in a common salutation, he got his mail from the office, and stood at the bar to read a letter. He had a brave, handsome face, and his well-formed figure was clad in garments of finer fashion, more easily worn, than was the wont of young farmers. Yet a shrewd guess would place him as a prosperous member of that class. He took no part in the conversation nor gave it apparent heed, yet joined in the general murmur of approval with which Jacob's remark was received by all but the non-committal landlord, the silent stranger, whose keen, deliberate eyes roved over the company, and Hiel, who stoutly asserted, "I'd jest as soon du it as send a stray hoss er critter back tu the' owner. Yis, sir, jest as soon airn a dollar a-ketchin' a nigger as any other sort o' prop'ty."

"I think you would, Hiel," said the newcomer, in a tone that for all its quietness did not conceal contempt; and then he went out, and his sleigh-bells were already jingling out of hearing when Hiel's slow retort was uttered:—

"That 'ere Bob Ransom cuts consid'able of a swath, but he 'll be consid'able older 'n he is naow 'fore he gits ol' Quaker Barclay's darter. Ketch him lettin' his gal marry anybody aoutside o' the Quaker an' Boberlition ring."

In some way, the brawny, coarse-featured Hiel seemed more than others to attract the regard of

the stranger, who held him in casual conversation till the rest had departed, and warmed his heart with a parting glass of the landlord's most potent liquor.

III

The stage-coach had left Lemuel far behind when he turned into a less frequented road, which led him, after a mile of uninterrupted plodding, to a group of farm-buildings that flanked it on either side, and clustered about a great square unpainted house. From the unshuttered lower windows broad bands of light shone hospitably forth into the dim whiteness, revealing here the furrows of a newly beaten track, there a white-capped hitching-post, and above, a shining square of snowy shed-roof, beneath which the mare made her way without guiding. Lemuel, disembarking noiselessly, looked cautiously about before he uncovered his passenger, and whispered to him to follow into the stable, whither he led as one familiar with the place even in the darkness. Opening the door of an inclosed stall, and assuring himself by feeling that it was filled with straw, he gently pushed the negro in.

"Now thee cover thyself up an' keep still till thee hears thy name called. Put this medicine in thy pocket, and don't let thyself cough. Thee'll be made comfortable as soon as possible, but thee must be patient."

With these whispered injunctions Lemuel silently

closed the door upon his charge, and, after blanketing the mare, entered the house without other announcement than the stamping of his snowy feet. The family were at supper in the large kitchen, which was full of the light and warmth of a wide fireplace, and the savor of wholesome fare that the chilled and hungry guest sniffed with appreciative foretaste.

Zebulon Barclay, a man of staid, benevolent mien, with kindly keen gray eyes, sat at the board opposite Deborah, his wife, a portly woman, whose calm face, no less kindly than his own, wore the tranquil dignity of self-conquest and assured peace of soul. Beside her sat their daughter Ruth, like her mother in feature, and with promise of the attainment of the maternal serenity in her bright young face, yet with some harmless touches of worldly vanity in the fashion of her dress. There were also Julia, the hired girl, a brisk spinster of thirty-five, and Jerome, the hired man, a restless-eyed Canadian, both of whom were of the world's people; the one shocked their employers by her levity, and the other with his mild profanity.

"How does thee do, Deb'ry?" said the visitor, advancing straight to the matron with outstretched hand, as she turned in her seat and recognized him. "Keep thy settin', keep thy settin'," he protested against her rising to greet him, and then bustled around to Zebulon, who arose to give him welcome,

and a glance of intelligence passed between him and his wife which the daughter caught and understood.

“Why, Lemuel,” said the host heartily, “how does thee do? And how are Rebecca and the children?”

As Lemuel replied he mumbled in an undertone, “I left a package in the stable for thee.”

“Oh, Rebecca is well, is she?” Zebulon remarked with satisfaction, and without apparent notice of the other information. “And is it a general time of health among Friends in your quarter? Well, lay off thy greatcoat, and have some supper as soon as thee’s warm enough. Jerome will put out thy horse directly.”

Lemuel hesitated, but began the arduous task of getting off his tight surtout as the Canadian arose from the table and took the tin lantern from its hook.

“I b’lieve I hain’t seen thee afore, Jerome. Is thee tol’able well? And I say for it, if that hain’t thee, Julia! Thee stays right by, don’t thee? Wal, that’s clever.” He paused in the struggle with his surtout, when the Canadian went out, to ask, with a nod toward the door that had closed behind him, “Is he a safe person, Zeb’lon?”

“I’m not quite clear, but I fear not,” said Zebulon, laying hold of the stubborn coat. “We’ll be on our guard. While he’s out, Ruth, thee’d better

carry some victuals up to the room, and when he comes in I'll get him out of the way till we get our package upstairs. Has thee had it in thy keeping long, Lemuel?"

"Goin' on a week, an' would ha' ben glad tu a spell longer, for he's got a turrible cold an' cough, but we 'spected they was sarchin' for him, an' we dassent keep him no longer, an' so I started at four o'clock this mornin'; an' I tell thee, I found tough travelin' most o' the way."

"Well, I'm glad thee's got here safe, Lemuel. Now sit right down to thy supper. Thee'll have a chance to step out and bring in thy goods."

The Canadian entered hastily and in evident trepidation. "Say, Mésieu Barcle," he burst out, "you s'pose ghos' can cough, prob'ly?"

"What's thee talking about, Jerome?" Zebulon asked in surprise.

"Yas, sah, bah jinjo, Ah'm was hear nowse in de barn zhus' sem lak somebody cough, an' Ah b'lieve he was ghos' of dat hol' man come dead for 'sumption on de village las' week 'go."

"Nonsense, Jerome; it was a cat sneezing that thee heard. Don't put out the lantern, but come down cellar with me and get some small potatoes for the sheep."

"Cat? Bah gosh, you'll got cat sneeze lak dat, Ah'm ant want for hear it yaller, me," Jerome retorted, as he led the way down cellar.

Lemuel's hand was on the latch, when there was a sound of arriving sleigh-bells.

"What be we goin' tu du?" he asked, turning a troubled face to the women. "That poor creatur' must n't stay aout in the cold no longer. Who 's that a-comin' in, wi' bells on the' horse?"

"Let me go," said Ruth, blushing red as a rose. "I can bring the man in safe."

"Oh, it 's some friend of thine that 's come?" Lemuel asked; but the shrewd twinkle of his eyes showed that he needed no answer. "Well, go intu the box stall and call for John, and bring in the one who answers."

Ruth hastily put on a hood and shawl and went out. A tall figure advanced from the shed to meet her with outstretched hands, which she clasped for an instant as she said in a low voice, "Don't speak to mē. Don't see me, nor any one I may have with me; and wait a little before thee comes in, Robert," and she disappeared in the dark shadows of the building.

Presently she came out with the shivering negro almost crouching behind her, and led him into the house. In the kitchen her mother met him with an assuring word of welcome, and guided him from it so quickly into a narrow staircase that it seemed to the others as if they had seen but a passing shadow, gone before they could catch form or feature.

When Zebulon Barclay returned from the cellar, Lemuel was quietly eating his supper, waited upon by the nimble-handed Julia, Ruth sat by the fireplace in decorous, low-voiced conversation with Robert Ransom, and the quiet room gave no hint of a recent unaccustomed presence. Lemuel pushed aside his plate and supped the last draught of tea from his saucer with a satisfied sigh before he found time for much conversation.

"I s'pose thee's heard what turrible goin's-on the anti-slavery meetin' hed tu Montpelier, Zeb'-lon?" he asked.

"Heard?" his friend replied, his calm face flushing and his eyes kindling. "I saw it with my own eyes, and a shameful sight it was to see in the capital of this free State. Deborah and I were there."

"Thee don't say so! And was it as bad as the papers tell for?"

"Even worse than any papers but our own report it. The 'Voice of Freedom' and the 'Liberator' tell it as it was. Several of the speakers were pelted with rotten eggs, and there were threats of laying violent hands upon some."

"But the' wa'n't nobody r'ally hurt?"

"No, but Samuel J. May was seriously threatened; and I don't know what might have happened if Deborah, here, had n't taken his arm and walked out through the mob with him. That shamed them to forbearance."

"Thee don't say so!" Lemuel again ejaculated. "But I guess if Jonathan Miller was there, he was n't very docyle?"

"Well, no," rejoined Zebulon, "Jonathan is not a man of peace, and he called the rioters some pretty hard names, and faced them as brave as a lion."

Lemuel rubbed his hands in un-Quakerly admiration of this truculent champion of the oppressed, and said, with a not altogether distressed sigh, "I'm afeard he would n't hesitate tu use carnal weepsons if he was pushed tew fur. He has been a man of war, an' fit in Greece."

"W'at dat?" asked Jerome, who had been listening intently as he slowly cut the sheep's potatoes, and now held his knife suspended and stared in wide-eyed wonder. "He was faght in grease? Ah'm was hear of mans faght in snow, an' faght in water, an' faght in mud, but bah jinjo, faght in grease, Ah ant never was hear so 'fore, me."

"Why, Jerome," explained Zebulon, with an amused smile, "thee don't understand. Greece is a country, away across the sea, where this brave man went, according to his light, to help the people war against their oppressors, the Turks."

"Bah jinjo," said the Canadian, resuming his occupation, "dat mus' be w're de folkses leeve on de fat of de lan', sem Ah'ms hear you tol' of some-tam. An' dey got turkey too, hein? Ah'ms b'lieve dat was good place for go, me."

“When it is quite convenient, Zeb’lon,” Lemuel said, after some further talk of anti-slavery affairs, diverging to the most economic means of procuring free-labor goods, “I want an opportunity tu open my mind tu thee an’ Deb’ry consarnin’ certain weighty matters.”

“Come right in the other room,” responded the host, rising and leading the way. “I think Deborah is there.”

The Canadian, presently finishing his task and his last pipe, lighted a candle and climbed the stairs to his bed in the kitchen chamber, and Julia, having set the supper dishes away and hung her wiping-cloths on the poles suspended from the ceiling by iron hooks, with a satisfied air of completion, discreetly withdrew, and the young people had the rare opportunity of being alone.

“Ruth, you must give me a glimmer of hope,” Robert Ransom pleaded.

“How can I when it would grieve father and mother so to have me joined to a companion who is not of our faith, and has so little unity with us on the question of slavery? If thee could but have light given thee to see these matters as they are so clearly shown to us!”

“If I would pretend to be a Quaker, and meddle with affairs that don’t concern me,” he said bitterly, “I should be all right, and they would give me their daughter. But I can’t pretend to believe

what I don't, even for such a reward. As for the other matter of difference, you know, Ruth, that I would n't hold a slave or send one back to his master; but slavery exists under the law, and we have no more business to interfere with the slaveholders' rights than they with ours."

"There can be no right to do wrong, and it is every one's business to bear testimony against evil-doing. Thee knows, Robert, I would not take thee on any pretense of belief. But if thee could only have light!"

"Oh, Ruth, you will not let these differences of belief keep us apart? What are they, to stand in the way of our love?"

"It would not be right to deny thee is very dear to me, Robert, and that I pray the way may be opened for us, but I cannot see it clear yet." Ruth's eyes met his with a look that was warmer than her calm words.

"But you will, Ruth," he said, with suppressed earnestness; and then a stir and louder murmur of voices were heard in the next room. "The Friends have 'broke their meeting,' as your people say, and it's time for me to go. I want to caution you, though, to keep a certain person you have in the house very close. I'm afraid there are parties on the lookout for him not far off."

"Oh, thank thee, Robert. Why does thee think so?" she asked in some alarm.

“From something I heard in the village to-day, I think there’s a party of slave-hunters prowling around in this part of the State: I saw a stranger at Manum’s to-night who is likely enough to be one of them. It’s an odd season for a man to be traveling for pleasure here. There may be nothing in it, but tell your father to be careful. Good-night.”

Under cover of the noise of Ransom’s exit Jerome closed the disused stovepipe hole in the chamber floor, at which he had been listening, crept into bed, and fell asleep while puzzling out the meaning of what he had overheard.

Ruth Barclay lost no time in imparting the caution to her parents and their trusty friend Lemuel, and her father’s thoughtful face was troubled as he said, “Our poor friend must have rest. Thy mother has been ministering to him, and says he is a very sick man. He cannot go farther at present, but I wish he was nearer Canada. Well, we will watch and wait for guidance. Perhaps to-morrow night I can take him to thy uncle Aaron’s, and then we can count on his safety. I hope thee has not been indiscreet in letting Robert into our secret, my child?”

“Thee need not fear, father,” Ruth answered, with quiet assurance. “Robert is faithful.”

“I am not quite clear,” and the father sighed. “Robert is not light or evil-minded, but his father is a Presbyterian and a Democrat, and very bitter

against Friends and anti-slavery people. I am not quite clear concerning Robert."

IV

The next morning Jerome was encouraging the fire newly kindled from the bed of coals on the hearth, and tiptoeing between it and the wood-box in his stockings, when Julia made her appearance in the kitchen, holding between her compressed lips some yet unutilized pins while she tied the strings of her check apron.

"Morny, Julie," he saluted cheerily. Her speech being restrained by the pins, she nodded, and he went on interrogatively, as he seated himself and began mellowing his stiff boots with thumb and fingers: "Ah 'ms tol' you, Julie. W'at you s'pose kan o' t'ing was be raoun' dese buildin' for scairt me so plenty?"

"Why, J'rome?" Julia, like a true Yankee, answered with a question, when she had found a place in her dress for the last pin. "What hes ben a-scarin' of you, I sh'd like tu know?"

"Ah 'ms can' tol' you, 'cause Ah 'ms can' see; Ah 'ms only zhus' hear. Las' naght w'en Ah 'ms go on de barn, Ah 'ms hear some nowse lak somebody cough, cough, an' dere ant not'ing for see. W'en Ah 'ms go on de bed, Ah 'ms hear it some more upstairs, cough, cough, zhus' de sem. Ah 'ms b'lieve it was ghos'."

Julia searched his face with a quick glance, and compelled her own to express no less fear and wonder. "Good land o' massy! You don't say!" she exclaimed in an awed undertone. "Where did it 'pear tu be, J'rome?"

"Ah don' know if it be in de chimbley or behin' de chimbley, me. Ah 'ms 'fraid for examine."

"Examine! Ketch me a-pokin' behind that 'ere chimbley, if I c'd git there, which it's all closed up these I do' know haow many year. No, sir, not for all this world, in broad daylight, I would n't!" Julia protested with impressive voice and slow shakes of the head.

"Bah jinjo! W'at you s'pose he was?" Jerome asked, under his breath.

"I've hearn tell't the Injuns er the British killed some hired man there, 'way back in Gran'-f'ther Barclay's day," Julia whispered; and then, in a more reassuring tone, "But you may depend it hain't nothin' 'at'll hurt us, if we let it alone, J'rome."

"W'at for Zeb'lon try foolish me wid cat sneeze w'en he know it was be ghos'? Ah 'ms ant s'pose Quaker mans was tol' lie, prob'ly. Ah 'ms hear dat Ramson tol' Rut' he 'fraid somet'ing. Ah don' know, me." And having pulled on his boots after a brief struggle, he lighted the lantern and went out to his chores.

"I wonder haow much the critter heard?" Julia

soliloquized, as she leaned on the broom and looked with unseeing eyes at the door which had just closed behind him, "an' if he mistrusts suthin'? I would n't trust him no further 'n I'd trust a dog wi' my dinner."

When Deborah Barclay came into the kitchen her usually placid face was troubled, and it was not lightened when Julia told her suspicions, ending with the declaration, "You can't never trust a Canuck, man or woman, an' this 'ere J'rome loves colored folks as a cat loves hot soap. He's al'ys an' forever a-goin' on abaout 'em."

"Ah, me!" Deborah sighed. "The way seems dark this morning. Zebulon was taken with one of his bad turns in the night and is n't able to get up, and Lemuel is obliged to go home at once. We heard last night that there are slave-hunters about, and if it is needful to remove our poor friend upstairs to a safer place we have no one that we can trust to do it, — if indeed he can be removed without endangering his life; for he's in a miserable way and needs rest and nursing. But perhaps the way will be made clear to us. It always has been in these matters."

Friend Lemuel reëmbarked on his homeward voyage, in the huge bread-tray, soon after the early breakfast, and the Quaker household fell into more than its wonted outward quiet. This was scarcely disturbed when, in the afternoon, Jehiel James drove

past, and halted a little for a chat with Jerome to discuss the merits of the colt the latter was breaking. It did not escape Julia's sharp eyes that the two had their heads together, nor did her ears fail to catch Hiel's parting injunction: "Come over tu the tarvern in the evenin' an' we'll strike up a dicker for the cult."

"I guess suthin' 'll happen so 's 't you won't go tu no tarvern tu-night," she said to herself. "I b'lieve there 'll be a way pervided, as aour folks says, tu hender it," and she went about her work considering the possible ways of Providence.

Not long afterward Jerome came in, and on some pretext went to his sleeping-room. Julia, listening intently while he moved stealthily to and fro, or maintained suspicious intervals of silence, thought she detected once the cautious opening of a door. When he reappeared there was an ill-concealed gleam of triumph in his beady black eyes, and they furtively sought hers as if to read her thoughts.

"Ah 'ms t'ink Ah 'ms ant mos' never goin' fan mah tobac," he said, ostentatiously biting off a corner of a plug, and then asked, "Haow was be Zeb'lon? He ant goin' be seek, don't it?"

"I do' know, J'rome. He 's putty bad off. He 's got a burnin' fever an' a turrible pain acrost him. I should n't wonder if you hed tu go arter the darkter this evenin'."

"Ah 'ms can' go dis evelin'," he answered has-

tily. "Ah 'ms gat some beesinees, me. W'at for Ah can' go gat docter 'fore de chore, hein?"

"You'll hafter go right past the tarvern tu git the Thompsonian darkter, which aour folks won't hev no other," she answered irrelevantly.

"More Ah 'ms t'ink of it," Jerome said, after a little consideration, "more Ah 'ms t'ink Ah 'm could go."

"If I only hed sperits enough," Julia communed with herself meantime, "I'd git you so all-fired minky, you would n't know where tu go, an' would n't git there if you did. But Mis' Barclay would n't le' me hev enough tu du that, not tu save all Afriky. Mebby, though," with a flash of inspiration, "she'd le' me hev a good doste for medicine."

"J'rome," she said aloud, "what's the motter ails ye? Ye hain't a-lookin' well."

"Me? Ah 'm was feel fus'-rate."

"But you hain't well, — I know you hain't. You look pale's you can, complected as you be, and you're dark'n under your eyes. I must git you suthin' tu take. Mebby I c'n git a doste o' hot sperits f'm Mis' Barclay."

Jerome's face was comical, with its mixed expression of satisfaction and simulated misery. "Bah jinjo, Julie, Ah 'ms ant felt so well Ah 'ms t'ink Ah was. Ah 'ms gat col' come, w'en Ah 'ms chaupin'. Dey ant not'ing cure me so fas' lak some whiskey."

“Don’t you say nothin’, an’ I ’ll see if I c’n git you a doste afore supper.”

Ruth was in close attendance upon her father while her mother ministered to the hidden fugitive, so the handmaiden had little opportunity for speech with either till toward nightfall. At the first chance, in a beguiling tone, she besought Deborah: “I du hate tu ask you, but I be so tuckered an’ kinder all gone, I wish ’t you ’d gi’ me a rael big squilch o’ sperits.”

“Why, surely, thee poor child, if thee needs it, thee shall have it. I ’ll give thee the bottle, and thee can help thyself. I know thee ’ll be prudent,” and Deborah passed up the narrow staircase with a steaming bowl of gruel.

When possessed of the spirits, Julia fortified herself with a moderate dram, “jest tu keep my word good,” she said to herself. “Now I ’ll see what I can du for the benefit of your health, Mr. J’rome,” and she poured out a bountiful draught of the ripe old Jamaica, and added to it, from a vial, a spoonful of a dark liquid, carefully stirred the mixture, and tasted it with critical deliberation.

“That tinctur’ o’ lobeles does bite, but my sakes, he won’t never notice. There you come,” as she heard Jerome stamping at the threshold. “I hope this ’ere won’t kill ye, not quite, but you ’ll think it’s goin’ tu if you never took no lobeles afore. My senses!” and she made a disgusted face as she

recalled her own experience of Thompsonian treatment. A few minutes later she covertly handed Jerome the glass, and with a sense of righteous guilt watched his eager draining of the last drop.

"Oh, Julie," he whispered hoarsely, with resounding smacks of satisfaction, "you was good womans. Dat was cure me all up."

"I du hope it'll du good," she responded, and mentally added, "an' keep you f'm tellin' tales out o' school."

Warmed by the potent spirits, and without the calm restraint of his employer's presence, Jerome was more than usually garrulous at the supper-table, till suddenly his tongue began to falter and a ghastly pallor overspread his dark face.

"Oh!" he groaned, as his glaring eyes sought imploringly the alarmed countenances of the women, lingering longest upon Julia's, "w'at you s'pose hail me? Oh, Ah 'ms goin' to dead! Mah hinside all turn over! Oh, Julie, was you pazzin me wid bugbed pazzin?" He pushed himself from the table and staggered toward the door, whither he was anxiously followed by Deborah and Ruth.

"What is it, Jerome? Is it a sickness or a pain?" Deborah inquired with concern. "Shall I give thee some pepper tea, or salt and water? Thee 'd better go upstairs and lie down."

"Oh, sacré, mon Dieu!" he groaned. "All Ah 'ms want was for dead, so quick Ah can! Oh,

Ah 'ms bus' open! Ah 'ms bile over! Ah 'ms tore up! Dat damn hol' gal Julie spile me all up!" and he floundered out of doors, retching and groaning.

Deborah was about to follow him, when she was withheld by Julia. "Don't you stir a step arter him, Mis' Barclay. He'll come all right plenty soon 'nough. I know what ails him. I only give him a little doste o' medicine."

"Julia Peck," said Deborah severely, "what has thee been doing?"

"I'll tell ye the hull truth, Mis' Barclay, as true as I live an' breathe. I was jes' as sure as I stan' here that him an' that 'ere Hiel James was a-convin' tu help take that man we've got in aour chamber, an' Jerome was a-peekin' raoun' this very arternoon tu find aout if he was here; an' I know by the look of him he did find aout, an' he was a-goin' tu the tarvern tu-night tu let 'em know, an' I jest put a stop tu it; for what was we a-goin' tu du, with Mr. Barclay sick abed, an' nob'dy but us women? Naow, I don't think he'll go jest yit."

Deborah smiled while she tried to express a proper degree of severity in her words and voice. "Julia, I fear thee has done wrong. I do hope thee has n't given the poor misguided man anything very injurious?"

"As true as I live an' breathe, it hain't nothin' but tinctur' o' lobeles, an' it'll clear aout his stomach an' du him good."

“We will hope for the best. But ah me, we are sore beset. We have no way to get our friend to a place of safety to-night, and to-morrow the slave-hunters may be here, and they will search the whole house. Besides, the poor man’s cough would betray him wherever we hid him. What can we do?”

“Would n’t Mr. Weeks help, if we c’d git him word? I c’d cut over there in no time, if you say so,” and Julia made a move toward her hood and shawl behind the door.

“Thee’s very kind. I’ve thought of him, but he’s gone across the lake to visit Friends, and won’t be back till Seventh Day. And he’s the only Friend here that’s in full unity with us in these matters,” and Deborah sighed.

“Could n’t I take Tom and get the man to uncle Aaron’s before morning, mother?” asked Ruth.

“Oh, my child, if thee could, he is not able to ride so far. No, dear; yet I know not what to do or which way to turn,” said the mother, and she walked to the window, and stood looking out, as if some guidance was to come to her out of the growing shadows of evening.

“Mother,” said Ruth earnestly, after an unbroken silence of some length, “I will get some one to help us. Julia, will thee help me harness Tom? Don’t ask me any questions, mother, but thee trust me.”

“I do trust thee, my child. But I can’t think who thee can get.”

"I'll harness or du anything, Reuth; but if that Canuck does turn hisself wrong side aout an' die, don't you tell of me. But I guess he wan't borned tu die of Thompsonian medicine; an' there he comes. I'm glad, for I al'ys did spleen agin findin' corpses layin' raoun' permiscus."

Jerome came into the room, and, woe-begone of countenance and limp of form, too sick to notice any lack of sympathy, he crept ignominiously on all fours up the stairs to bed. Julia gave a sigh of relief as she closed the door behind the abject figure.

"There, thanks be tu goodness and lobeles, he's safte for this night. Naow, Reuth, we'll harness the hoss."

V

The faithful old family horse seemed to understand the necessity of a swifter pace than was employed in his jogging to First Day and Fifth Day meetings, and he took a smart trot with little urging by his young mistress. The half-buried fences and the trees drifted steadily past, and the long shadows cast in the light of the rising moon swung slowly backward, while the jagged crests of the distant hills marched forward in stately procession; yet in her anxiety the progress was slow to Ruth, the way never so long. It was shortened by the good fortune of meeting Robert Ransom a half-mile from his home, and she counted it no less a favor to be

saved the awkwardness of seeking an interview with him.

She was not disappointed in his response to her appeal, and it was not long before he was at her father's bedside. A short consultation was held concerning the best means of baffling the slave-hunters, whose descent upon this suspected hiding-place of the fugitive might occur at any time.

"I'll carry the man anywhere you say, Mr. Barclay. Mrs. Barclay says he's too weak to go far, and I'll tell you my plan. It's to take him to our sugar-house. No one ever goes there till sugaring-time, after the wood is hauled, and that's just finished. It's warm and there's a bunk in it, so that by carrying along some buffaloes and blankets he can be made almost as comfortable as in any house."

"I don't know a safer place, for no one would ever think of looking for a runaway negro on thy father's premises," said Zebulon, with due deliberation, yet with a humorous twinkle in his eye, and then added, "My! what would he say?"

"I don't think it necessary to ask him, and I'll take the man there at once, if you say so." The young man's kindly face expressed an earnestness in which there was no guile.

"I think thy plan is the only one we can adopt, and the sooner we do so the better. The women folks will provide thee with blankets, and there must be food and medicine. Deborah, does thee

think he will be able to keep his own fire and wait on himself?"

"He is not fit to leave his bed," she answered; "but he must, long enough to get to a place of safety. Does thee think I should go with him, Zebulon? I don't see the way clear to leave thee, my dear, nor to let Ruth go, though she would not shrink from it if it seemed best."

Robert's face flushed, and he hastily said, "Ruth go to nurse a sick" — The offensive name "nigger," forbidden in that household, though familiar enough in his own, was barely withheld. "No, it wouldn't be right for either to go, Mrs. Barclay. I will take care of the man."

Zebulon bestowed a grateful look upon him, and stretched forth his hand to clasp that of the young man. "Robert, I never thought to look to thee for help in such a case. Thee is very kind, and I shall not forget it in thee. If it is ever in my power to serve thee, thee must feel free to call on me."

Robert blushed almost guiltily as he silently thought of the reward he most desired, and quietly thanked the sick man for his kindly expressions.

"Now, I think thee would better be about the matter at once. Look out for Jerome, and be sure that no one is watching the house when thee starts, Robert. Farewell."

Deborah stayed a moment to administer a dose of Thompsonian medicine known as "No. 6," when

Zebulon said, getting his breath after the fiery draught, "Well, help has come in an unexpected way. I did not expect so much from Neighbor Ransom's son."

"It is indeed a favor," and there was a hope in the mother's heart that the way might also become clear for her daughter's happiness.

The Canadian had fallen into such a deep sleep from the reaction of Julia's heroic treatment that he was not aroused by any stir around the house. The fugitive was taken from his hiding-place, a snug little chamber back of the great warm chimney, which had given safe and comfortable shelter to many escaping slaves, a use to which it was devoted. With the help of his ready-handed female assistants Robert soon had his charge in the sleigh, with bedding, provisions, and medicines.

When the sick man was carefully wrapped in blankets and hidden under the buffalo, Robert drove along the highway, swiftly and silently, till at last he turned through a gap into a pathless field, across which he made slower progress to the dusky border of the woods. Guided by familiar landmarks, he came to the narrow portal of a wood-road that wound its unbeaten but well-defined way among gray tree-trunks, snow-capped stumps and rocks, and thick haze of undergrowth. Inanimate material forms and impalpable blue shadows assumed shapes of fearful living things, to the strained imagination of the

negro, who was now permitted to free his head from the robe. He shrank as if struck when a tree snapped under stress of the cold, — a noise unaccountable to him, but like the click of a gun-lock, or the shot of a rifle, or the crack of a whip.

With calm manner and reassuring words Ransom again and again quieted the often reawakened fears of the fugitive, till at last they reached the sugar-house. It was a picture of loneliness and desertion, with smokeless, snow-capped chimney and pathless approach. When they entered, the bare interior revealed by the light of a candle was dismal and comfortless. The blankets and pillows were soon arranged upon the bunk, and, having made his guest as easy as possible, Ransom kindled a fire in the great arch over which the sap was boiled, and put the stock of provisions into the rude corner cupboard.

The yellow light of the candle and the red gleams of the fire were reflected by some tin utensils that hung on the wall, by an old musket leaning in a corner, and by the piled tier of sap-buckets; the dancing shadows tripped to a less solemn measure; a genial warmth began to pervade the room, and soon the place assumed the cheerful homeliness of a snug winter camp.

The troubled face of the negro brightened as he looked around, watching his companion's preparations with languid interest.

“Dis yere’s a mighty nice place fur layin’ low,” he said, in a hoarse voice. “You’s powerful good to fetch me here, marster, an’ I’s ’bleeged to ye.”

“That’s all right, my man,” Robert replied, as he set an inverted sap-tub by the bunk and placed a bottle of medicine upon it. “Now here’s the medicine for you to take, and my watch to show you when to take it. Keep quiet, and I’ll be back in a couple of hours;” and after replenishing the fire, he departed to take the horse home, and finally returned on foot to his self-appointed post.

Perhaps the secrecy of the service, the relish of baffling eager search, and the possible chance of adventure made Ransom’s task more congenial than the mere sense of duty could have done, and he plodded his way back over the snowy road with a cheerful heart. When he had ministered to his patient’s needs and fed the fire, he rolled himself in his blankets and fell asleep.

VI

Morning found Jerome recovered from the last night’s illness, but not restored to good humor. He had satisfied himself that the negro had been removed from the house, but how or where he could not conjecture, and he was savagely disappointed that the chance and reward of betrayal had slipped beyond his reach. As he plied his axe in Zebulon

Barclay's wood lot, the strokes fell with spiteful vigor; and when a great tree succumbed to them and went groaning to the final crash of downfall, he gloated over it as if it were a personal enemy. As the echoes boomed their last faint reverberation and left him in the midst of silence, his ear caught the sound of distant axe-strokes; and when, across the narrow cleared valley that lay between him and the next wooded hillside, he saw a column of smoke rising above the tops of the maples, after a long, intent look he asked himself, "W'at you s'pose somebodee was do on hol' Ramson sugar-place, dis tam de year?"

Unable to answer except by unsatisfactory guesses, he resumed his chopping; but the itch of curiosity gave him no rest, for he was as inquisitive as any native of the soil; and when it could no longer be endured, he struck his axe into a stump, and set forth in quest of the certain knowledge which should be its cure. As he cautiously drew near the sugar-house, in its rear, under cover of the great maple trunks that stood about it on every side, he heard low voices in broken conversation, and a moment later a racking, distressful cough which excited his suspicions.

Stooping low, he crept from the nearest tree to the one window, whose board shutter was swung open for the admission of light, and peered stealthily in. The brief survey revealed Robert Ransom

looking anxiously down on the ghastly face of the negro. There was no softening touch of pity in the malignantly triumphant gleam of the Canadian's snaky eyes as he returned to the cover of the trees, gliding from one to another till he regained the valley, and then resumed his chopping.

Throughout the day, at the sugar-house, the winter stillness was unbroken save by the small voices of the titmice and nuthatches and the subdued tapping of the industrious woodpeckers, sounds that harmonized with it and but intensified it. The place seemed as secure from enemies in its complete isolation as it was remote from the reach of medical aid, which Ransom felt was needed, and of which he was often on the point of going in quest. The sick man was racked with pain at times, his mind wandered, and he talked incoherently.

"It's mighty good to be free, Marse Ransom, 'deed it is dat. Oh, but it's col' up dis away. Oh, de snow! I's wadin' in de snow de hull endurin' time! It's freezin' on me! I's coming to de sunshine! I kin feel it a-warmin'! I's in de eberlastin' snow, an' de dogs is arter me! I can't git ahead none! Fur de Lawd's sake, don' let 'em kotch me!"

"Don't be afraid. Nothing shall harm you. We're safe here," Ransom would repeat again and again in reassuring tones, while great beads of perspiration gathered on the dusky face, ashen gray

with sickness and terror, and the stalwart form would now be shaken with ague, now burned with fever.

“Take a drink of hot stuff, John, and let me cover you up warm and good,” Ransom urged, bringing a steaming cup of herb tea from the fire, saying to himself, “It’s old woman’s medicine, but it’s all I have.”

In the afternoon the sick man became easier, and fell into such a quiet sleep that his nurse began to think the rest and the simple remedies were working a cure. When night fell and the multitude of shadows were merged in universal gloom, he closed the window shutter, lighted the candle, and made needful preparations for the lonely night-watch. As he sat by the bunk, ready to attend to any want, there was no sound but the regular labored breathing, the crackling fire, the fall of a smouldering brand, and the slow gnawing of a wood-mouse behind the tier of tubs. He felt a kind of exhilaration when he realized that he was so interested in the welfare of this poor waif that he thought nothing of his own weariness or trouble, but only how he could best serve the forlorn stranger.

After the passing of some hours, his charge still sleeping peacefully, Ransom thought he himself might take a little rest. He noiselessly replenished the fire with the last of the wood, and quietly stepped outside for more. He paused on the log step a mo-

ment, listening for one pulse of sound in the dead silence of the winter night. Not a withered leaf rustled in the bare treetops, not a buried twig snapped under the soft footfalls of wandering hare or prowling fox. Ransom loosed his held breath and was about to step into the moonlight, when he detected a stealthy invasion of the silence, and recognized the sharp screech of sleigh-runners and the muffled tread of horses. His heart leaped at the probability of coming help, for it could hardly be aught else. Yet he would not be too sure, and, re-entering the house, he closed the door softly.

He slipped aside the covering of a small loophole in the door, made to afford the sugar-maker the amusement of shooting crows when time hung heavy on his hands, and looked out upon the scene. The full moon had climbed halfway to the zenith, and its beams fell in broad bands of white between the blue shadows of the tree-trunks and full upon the open space in front of the sugar-house. Presently a sleigh came into the narrow range of his vision. It halted, and three men alighted. He started back in dismay, for at the first glance he recognized the burly form and coarse features of Hiel, and the dark-visaged traveler whom he had seen at the tavern, while the third figure was unknown. He hurriedly fastened the door, for there could be no doubt as to the purpose of the visitors.

Who could have betrayed the fugitive's hiding-

place? Escape was impossible, and successful resistance no less so. What could he do? As the unanswered questions rapidly revolved in his mind, his heart grew suddenly sick with the thought that the Barclays might suspect him of treachery. The fugitive's safety had been intrusted to him on his own offer. He was sharply recalled from these swift thoughts by a stir in the bunk. Aroused by the noise and instinctively divining danger, the negro had started up in terror and was staring imploringly at Ransom.

"Dey's arter me, marse. Don' let 'em git me. Dey'll wollup me. Dey'll jes' cut me to pieces. Don' let 'em kotch me."

"No, they shan't get you. Lie down and keep quiet," said Ransom, in a low, reassuring tone, still engaged with watching the movements of those outside.

The negro sank back submissively, with deep sighs and incoherent mutterings.

The door was now violently tried and loudly beaten upon, and a voice demanded that it should be opened.

"Who's there?" asked Ransom.

"Never mind. You jest open the door an' let us in," Hiel's voice answered.

"What do you want?"

"We want the nigger. Open the door, or we'll bust it. Come, naow, no foolin'."

“I won’t open the door,” said Ransom firmly ;
“break it in if you dare.”

As his eyes searched the room almost hopelessly for some means of defense or deliverance, they fell upon the old musket in the corner, and in the same glance he saw that a great and sudden change had come upon the face of the negro. The shock of fright had been too great, and the stamp of death was already set upon the drawn features. After the first instant a strange exultation sprang up in Ransom’s heart. An invisible ally would snatch the prey from their grasp, if he could but hold the hunters at bay for a while. He seized the musket and ran to the door. Looking out from his coign of vantage, he saw the three men advancing, carrying a heavy stick from the woodpile with the evident purpose of using it as a battering-ram. He thrust the rusty gun-muzzle through the loop-hole and called out, “Drop that, or I’ll send a charge of shot into you !”

The assailants hesitated only a moment when they saw the threatening muzzle, and then Ransom heard the log drop in the snow. Soon, after some consultation, there was a sound of stealthy footsteps in the rear of the shanty, as of some one reconnoitring in that quarter ; then the silence was broken by the gasping breath and whispers of the dying man. Ransom set the gun by the door and went to him.

“I’s mos’ ober de ribber — de dogs can’t kotch

me. De sun shinin' — de birds singin' — de bees hummin'. Good-by, marse, I's gwine."

The massive chest ceased its labored heavings. The look of terror faded out of the face, to give place to that expression of perfect rest which is the hopefulest solution to the living of the awful mystery of death.

Suddenly there were heavy blows on the shuttered window, which crashed in at once. At the same moment with this diversion in the rear came an assault upon the door. Ransom undid the fastening and threw it open. "You can come in," he said quietly.

Hiel and the stranger whom Ransom had first seen at the tavern entered cautiously, as if suspecting a trap, the latter with a cocked pistol in his hand.

"Don't be afraid, Hiel," Ransom said contemptuously; "the gun has n't been loaded for a year."

"Damn putty business fer Square Ransom's son, stealin' niggers is," Hiel declared. "Where's yer nigger, anyway?"

Ransom pointed to the bunk, and the stranger, drawing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, advanced toward the motionless figure. "Come, boy," he said sharply, "the little game is up, an' it's no use playin' 'possum. Hold out your hands." He roughly seized one of the lifeless hands. "What the hell!" he exclaimed, recoiling from the icy

touch. After an intent look at the quiet, peaceful face of him who had escaped from all bondage, he turned to Ransom, who stood calmly regarding him. "Well, Mr. Ransom, I reckon you've played it rather low down on us, but you've won the game and the niggah's yours. I reckon I don't want him. Come, boys, let's be off."

A LETTER FROM THE 'HIO

THE day was so near its close that the sun shone only on the tops of the tallest trees which were scattered along the crest of Watson's hill pasture. The long, attenuated shadows of the Watson homestead were absorbed in the great shadow of the western hills, and the evening song of robins was the dominant sound.

The labors of the day were ended, and the Watsons were out on the front stoop, in restful enjoyment of the "cool o' the evenin'." Uncle Peter and Aunt Charity, elderly, toil-worn people, were slumped into their respective splint-bottomed arm-chairs as if they had been dropped there to be picked up again when needed for further use. Peter pulled gently at his clay pipe, and as gently blew the smoke from his lips; but Charity had not even the knitting which was the usual accompaniment of her leisure moments, and sat with palms upturned upon the arm of her chair, gazing absently over the darkening landscape.

Phœbe Ann, a maiden on the verge of being classed as old, though not yet prim nor faded, seated herself on the step, and having pinioned an escaping wisp of her abundant hair with a high

horn back comb, rested her elbows on her knees, her cheeks upon her open palms, and let her keen glances wander from the "laylocks" going out of bloom beside the dooryard fence to the "piny" shedding the blood-red petals of its first blossoms on the knot-grass close beside her.

"Hev you shet up the chicken coop, Phœb' Ann? — cause the' might a skunk come," said her mother, whose voice had an oily crackle like the bubble of frying lard.

"M — mhm," the daughter made inarticulate affirmation as she turned her eyes toward the next neighbor's house, a furlong away, and silently wondered what Perkinses folks were all outdoors for. Looking down the road in the opposite direction, she descried a figure which further excited her interest. It was a tall man, who was advancing at a pace which could not be called brisk, though his long legs carried him over the ground at a rapid rate. Mrs. Watson adjusted her spectacles, and looked above the rims.

"Law sakes!" she exclaimed after careful scrutiny. "'T ain't nob'dy but Jer'd Waite. I see him goin' 'long down tow-ards the store, jest arter milkin'."

Phœbe Ann smoothed her hair and arranged her skirts more decorously as Jared turned in at the little gate, having the air of bearing news of some sort.

"Evenin'," he said, returning the general salutation as it was given and seating himself at the farther end of the step from Phœbe Ann. There was an expectant pause, but Jared did not seem disposed to break it, and Peter asked with neighborly interest:

"Got y' spring's work 'bout done, Jer'd?"

"Wal, gittin' so 's 't we c'n see a hole through," and conversation lagged again until Aunt Charity's voice bubbled up with the question:

"How 's ye' mother stan' it this spring, Jer'd?"

"Wal, 'bout so," was the reply.

"Git any news down to the store?" Peter asked, becoming impatient.

"Wal, no, I do' know 's the' is, nothin' pa'tic'lar. Oh" — Jared made a pretense of suddenly remembering something, and began a hasty search of his pockets, inside breast, outside breast, right-hand skirt, left-hand skirt; then looked in the crown of his hat; then returned to the pocket with which he began, and while his left hand dwelt in its depths, demanded:

"What'll ye give me for a letter, Phœbe Ann?"

"You hain't got none," she said, scanning his face sharply after following the movements of his hand. "You 're jest a-foolin'."

"S'posin' when I was down t' the pos'-toffice, which I was," he asked, smiling blandly upon her,

“Day, he says to me, ‘The ’s a letter for Watson’s folks, ’f you ’d just ’s lives as not kerry it up to ’em as you go ’long ’—an’ s’posin’ he gin it to me, what ’d you gi’ me for it?’”

“Now, Jer’d Waite, you gi’ me that letter right stret off,” and Phœbe Ann slid herself quickly along the step and snatched at Jared’s pocketed hand. But he evaded her, unfolding his long legs and springing upright with surprising agility.

“Thought you said I had n’t got none?” He drew a letter from his pocket, and held it at arm’s length above her head, and looking up at it, “Wal, I swan! ’Tain’t yourn, arter all said and done. It’s for your mother,” and he handed it to Aunt Charity.

“You hateful thing!” cried Phœbe Ann, turning away from him.

Presently, overcome by curiosity, she went up the steps and leaned over her mother, who was slowly spelling out the superscription. This was scrawled over so much of the face of the letter that the postmaster had found only room enough to write the price of the postage in one corner, and had written the name of the office and the date upon one corner of the back.

“Wal, I say for it,” Aunt Charity declared, “I du b’lieve it’s for your father, on’y they’ve made a mistake and writ ‘Mrs.’ insteady ‘Mr.’”

“Why, good land, mother, that’s the way they

do nower days — put the man's name for the woman's, if she 's married."

"Wal, I say for 't. That 's a great idee. Haow 's anybody goin' to know who 's who?" She turned the letter over and over, and scanned it from all points of view. "Wonder where on airth it come from. I du b'lieve it 's for you, father. Here," and she passed it over to Peter's outstretched hand.

"Twenty-five cents! I bet 't aint wuth half on 't," Peter said, as he read the figures in the corner. He then tried the address at various ranges, upside down and set on end, and then studied the back where the postmark was written, in a hand beyond his ability to decipher.

"I don't see where in tunket it come from, ner who writ it."

"Mebby you could find out by opening on 't," his daughter suggested.

He made several guesses before resorting to this expedient, but at last groped in the depths of his trousers pocket and drew his jackknife therefrom, which he opened, and began the delicate operation of unsealing the letter.

"There 's the marks o' somebody's thimble on the wafer, anyhow," he declared.

"Ta' care you don't cut none o' the writin'," Phoebe Ann cautioned; and his wife advised, "You 'd better let Phœb' Ann take her scissors."

He persisted in the use of the masculine imple-

ment and method till he succeeded in severing the wafer without serious damage to the paper and its contents.

The unusual stir upon the Watson porch had not escaped the notice of the Perkinses, and they now came over to learn its cause, little Mrs. Perkins leading the way with sprightly steps and masking the purpose of the visit with the "em'tin's" pitcher. Her daughter, not far behind, pretended a search for four-leaved clover, while the male head of the household followed more ponderously in a transparent pretense of being in no haste.

"Come right up, Mis' Perkins," Aunt Charity's voice bubbled hospitably, in spite of her interest in the letter. "Phœb' Ann, fetch a chair for Mis' Perkins an' Alviry."

Both protested they could not stop a minute, but took the proffered seats, and turned inquiring eyes upon Peter as he clumsily unfolded the letter. Lot Perkins declined a higher seat than the step, to which he carefully lowered his bulky frame, and as he glanced furtively at Peter, excused his coming by saying that he "follered the craowd, jes' tu keep th' women folks straight."

"Ye see, Jer'd he fetched us up a letter," Aunt Charity explained, "an' we can't make aout who it come from ner sca'cely who it's fer; but it 'pears to be fer father, an' so I s'pect it's f'm some o' his relations daown in Connect'cut, erless it's f'm his

brother 'Lias er some o' his folks over in the St. Lawrence country. It's quite a spell since we heard from 'em, but the' hain't no gr'et hands to write, none on 'em."

"Like's not you'll find aout when you read it," Mrs. Perkins suggested hopefully.

"That's jest what we're gittin' round to do as fast as we can," Aunt Charity said exultantly; "but father he hain't much used to readin' writin'."

"Oh, I should luf tu hear from 'Lias's wife," said Mrs. Perkins fervently.

"Wal, I snum!" Peter ejaculated, after intent study of the first words of the epistle. "'Tain't writ to me, say what ye will, erless it's got to be the fashion to call a man 'aunt.' Jes's much sense in that as a-callin' you 'Mis' Peter.' Anyway it begins, 'My dear aunt.'"

"Wal, now, I never," Aunt Charity exclaimed, in fresh surprise. "Then it's f'm some o' brother Isaac's children, aout West. Now, I be glad."

"I wisht it was f'm 'Lias's wife," sighed Mrs. Perkins. "I do' know when I've heard f'm 'Lias's wife. We used ter set the world by one 'nother when we was gals."

"Phœb' Ann, you take a holt an' read it out 'loud, won't ye?" Aunt Charity bubbled unctuously, and her daughter, taking the letter from her father, stooped toward the fading light, and began reading

slowly, interrupting herself with frequent comments and inquiries, and as often interrupted by one and another of the audience.

“ ‘Buckeye, O.’ Wonder what they want to stop and say ‘O’ for? ”

“ Why, goodness’ sakes, that stands for the ‘Hio, don’t you see? ” Mrs. Perkins exclaimed.

“ Why, yes, so it does,” Phœbe Ann admitted frankly. “ What a gump I be! ‘Buckeye, Ohio.’ ”

“ Buckeye, Buckeye! ” Mrs. Perkins questioned her memory, and out of it presently answered, “ Why, that ’s where Orson Holcomb went to. Now hain’t that odd! He used to be turrible ’tentive tu ’Lias’s wife when she was a gal, an’ I use ter hector her about him, an’ I guess she r’aly did more ’n like him, but ’Lias cut him out. I wonder ’f it says anything about him.”

“ ‘My dear aunt,’ ” Phœbe Ann resumed. “ I wonder which one on ’em writ it. Le’ ’s see,” and she searched for the writer’s name at the end of the sheet. “ Susan,” she announced. “ Susan Ward, wal, she hain’t got merried yit, anyway,” the maiden declared with considerable satisfaction.

“ Yes, Susan, she’s the third gal,” said her mother. “ Harri’t’s the oldest, then Lowizy, an’ Susan, an’ Jane Ann; that’s four, hain’t it? ” and she went over her pudgy fingers to make sure of the number.

"Dumb it! What odds does it make?" Uncle Peter demanded impatiently.

"Yis, four gals," Aunt Charity repeated, placidly. "Nat'rally Susan wrote, hevin' the most time an' hevin' ben to school most."

"I don't seem to remember Jane Ann," said Mrs. Perkins.

"She was a baby when they went to the 'Hio. My, how I did feel for Marier a-goin' that journey an' that child a-teethin'!"

"Mm-m," Mrs. Perkins moaned sympathetically.

"They was six weeks a-goin', an' it was a good three mont's afore we heerd they'd got there," Aunt Charity continued.

"What's the date o' this 'ere letter?" inquired Lot Perkins with interest.

"May the six'h," responded the reader. "I fer-got tu read it."

"That's come quick. On'y three weeks sence it started," said Lot. Peter uttered a sound of impatience, and the reading continued.

"I set down this afternoon to write a few lines to you to inform you of our health and welfare. We air all well as we ever was except mother, she enjoys considerable poor health this spring."

"There now," Aunt Charity broke in, "I allers tol' Marier she'd ortu commence a-takin' picry jest afore spring opens, but she never would, not faithful."

"I do' know 'baout picry," said Mrs. Perkins, with slow impressive wags of her head, "picry's pooty ha'sh. Naow, I should say pepsisiway steeped up in cider or sperits. The' hain't a fall but I hev him go int' the woods an' git me a hull lot o' pepsisiway. It's good for the blood, an' it's good for the stomerk; an' gives ye an appetite t' eat."

"Gosh, yes! More'n a ton on't in the garret," chuckled her husband, boring Jared's ribs with a forefinger.

"Naow, Mr. Perkins," his wife said reproachfully.

"Wal," he insisted, "you take an' put in a hull mess on 't every identical fall, an' never take none out; it 'cumulates, I tell ye."

"You can't say 'at I would n't ha' took some this very spring if the'd ben sperits in the haouse an' the cider had n't all been put in the vinegar baril."

"Dumb yer picry an' things!" Uncle Peter burst out. "Be ye goin' to read that 'ere letter, Phœb' Ann?"

"Yes, why don't ye? We're all a-waitin'," Aunt Charity urged, and Phœbe Ann, having kept her place with her finger while awaiting opportunity, went on: "'this spring, and father which he is troubled some with his asmy'" —

"Why don't he smoke mullein leaves? Take an' dry 'em an'" — Mrs. Perkins interrupted, but

Uncle Peter's chair gave a sharp, ominous squeak, and the reading continued.

“ — And Harret, she was married to a man last January.’ ”

“ ’T would ha’ ben cur’us if she ’d merried a woman,” Mr. Perkins interrupted, but the reader did not deign to notice his remark.

“ “ His name is Mr. Baker, and mother says you know his folks.’ ”

“ Baker, good land, yes ! ” her mother’s comfortable voice bubbled over afresh. “ There was True-man Baker used to live over on the East Ridge ; he sol’ out to Amos Jones, wa’ n’t it, father ? Yes, I ’m pooty sure it was. An’ wa’ n’t Amos’ wife a Carpenter f’m over t’ other side o’ the maountain ? Seems ’ough she was. Anyway, I know when father an’ I went to the fun’al — you remember it, don’t ye, father ? I sh’d think ye might, ’cause you forgot your han’kercher an’ stopt to the store an’ bought a hul yard o’ ginggum for ye a han’kercher, not hemmed ner nothin’. My, wa’ n’t I thankful ’at the sermon wa’ n’t ’fectin’ an’ you did n’t haf ter haul it out ary oncte ’fore folks. I got that ginggum yet, an’ you tew good bendiners to hum. There was a hul mess o’ folks there, strangers to us, her relations I s’pose. It was consumptiern ’at ailed her, though she wa’ n’t sick more ’n fo’ five year ’at we heered on.”

“ Sho, kinder sudden, wa’ n’t it ? ” and Lot gave

Jared's ribs another poke, but Aunt Charity went on with the Baker history.

"Trueman he went out intu York State, some'eres where the canawl goes, an' I hain't heered nothin' on him this ever so long. Mebby it's some o' his sons. I should think she might ha' wrote more partic'lar. Then there was Bakers up to Starkton, Jed and Ph'leman, cousins o' his'n, and Jed's wife was some related to Amos Jones' wife, I do' know ezackly how, an' Ph'leman he merried a schoolmarm. Why, Mis' Perkins, you know who she was, for I've heered you tell how 't you went to her in the flat-ruffed schoolhaouse."

"My sakes, yes. Mandy Blake. My, wa'n't she cross? I pity the man 'at hed her."

"Wal, they went off West, where I du not know; an' it may be it's some o' them Harri't's merried. An' the' was a fam'ly o' Bakers over to Highfield 'at I did n't know so much about, an' it might be one o' them. I wish 't she'd wrote more partic'lar."

"Mebby, 't was Baker in the spelling-book," Mr. Perkins guessed.

"Now, Mr. Perkins," his wife mildly reproved, "you quit a-foolin'."

"Dumb it, I wish 't she had n't merried nob'dy, an' then mebby we might ha' heered suthin' o' some account," Uncle Peter growled, in such a tone that his wife gently suggested: "Like 'nough you 'd bet-

ter go on wi' your readin', Phœb' Ann," and the reading began again.

" ' He 's a widower with five children and a good farm. We think Harret has got a good start in life for all waiting some years. Lowizy is going to be married in July, and you may hear interesting news of others of the family. Harret says to tell Cousin Phœby Ann she ought to come out West! ' "

" The impudence," cried the reader ; " jest's if " — but checked herself when no one else appeared to discover cause for indignation, and went on.

" " We have got twenty acres of wheat, which looks nice, and father expects to have as many acres planted to corn ' " —

" Gosh, twenty acres o' corn," Mr. Perkins said incredulously.

" " We keep ten cows, and have got a dozen steers fat enough to go now. How many hogs I do not know, and poultry father says more than he wants. ' "

" Hain't that just like the men," said Mrs. Perkins, " allers a-flingin' out suthin' about poultry? But mind ye, when it comes to eatin' of poultry an' aigs — My! "

" I guess you 'll hafter light a light 'fore you can read any more," said Aunt Charity, noticing how close her daughter's nose was getting to the sheet of foolscap.

“Gol dumb it,” Uncle Peter exclaimed, with increasing profanity, “can’t ye gab jest as well wi’out a light?”

“An’ by’m by it’ll come daylight ag’in,” Lot Perkins remarked cheerfully, and then in surprise as he casually scanned the eastern horizon, “What in time! Why, it hain’t a-comin’ yet, is ’t?”

His tone and suddenly alert attitude drew the attention of all the company, and the gaze of all followed his to a faint illumination of the sky behind the crest of a ridge half a mile away. The lower stars faded in the increasing light. The hill crest grew blacker against it. Lot Perkins, rising with deliberate haste, declared in the drawl that no excitement could greatly quicken:

“By grab! it’s a haouse afire! Jest the p’int o’ Miller’s! Git some pails an’ come on, men!”

He took the three steps of the porch at one stride, with another surmounted the commingled skirts of the two matrons, then plunged into the kitchen, and swooped up the water-pails in the sink, and bringing them forth unemptied, handed one to Jared, as he strode beside him toward the gate, which closed behind them with a rebounding clang before the rest of the company were well afoot.

“Jes’ ’s like ’s not it ’s four mild off,” said Uncle Peter, standing unmoved amid the flutter of woman-kind. “You can’t never tell how fur fire is.”

“The’s the milk pails on the back stoop. I’ll

fetch ye one, father," and Aunt Charity waddled through the kitchen with a ponderous tread that evoked a responsive clatter from stove utensils and loosely fitting window sashes, and presently returned with a pail so scrupulously clean that it cost her housewifely soul a pang to devote it to such use.

"I don't see what the tarnal haouse had to go an' ketch afire for jest as Phœb' Ann got where it was interestin'," said Uncle Peter, as he permitted the pail to be slipped upon his arm and then took his way down the path, behind Phœbe Ann and followed by the others, bemoaning the fire and speculating concerning the cause.

"Poor Mis' Miller! An' it just painted, inside an' out, last year," Aunt Charity wailed from the depths of her fat bosom.

"Jest kerlessness, you may depend," declared Mrs. Perkins, when Elvira wondered in a timid voice "if it ketched er was sot."

"Ashes in a berril er a sto' pipe in a chahmber. It mos' allers is."

"I du hope it won't bring on one o' her spells," Aunt Charity panted, as she laboriously climbed the wall beyond the road. "My sakes! Hain't you spry, you an' Alviry? Won't you jest take a holt o' this dipper? Ugh! My laigs be so short. I thought it might come handy to dip up with. There, thank goodness, I be over. An' ef your man an' Jer'd hain't halfway up the hill, an' Phœb' Ann

most ketched up wi' 'em, an' father, where 's he? I du b'lieve he 's tumbled int' the brook! Oh, there he is! My sakes alive, how it gains! It'll be clean burnt aout afore I git where I can see, but you need n't wait for me," she called after the retreating figures with noble unselfishness while her eyes were fixed on the brightening sky.

The frogs in the flag-bordered pools of the brook ceased their monotonous chime as the straggling volunteer fire brigade splashed by. Startled birds fluttered from the grass before it. The cows couched on the dry knolls stopped the slow chewing of cuds to stare in wonder at the strange nocturnal invasion till it passed unheeding them, and then, with deep drawn sighs of satisfaction, they resumed their interrupted rumination.

As Lot Perkins and Jared drew near the hill crest, followed closely by Phœbe Ann, sound of lungs and strong of limb, there appeared above it a broad point of smokeless flame that grew and broadened as they climbed, all growing short of breath at each step of the steep ascent and almost choked by the throbbing of their hearts. When they reached the top, it was observed by those who followed that they stopped and showed no intention of going farther. Lot sat down upon his inverted pail, and Jared placed his in a like position for Phœbe Ann, and stood near her with arms akimbo.

Uncle Peter's scant breath was so nearly spent

that he was glad to sit down and wait for those behind him.

“Wal, I s’pose by their a-stoppin’ it’s all up,” Mrs. Perkins sighed, as she and Elvira joined him. “I wonder if all the buildin’s ketched?”

“I don’t s’pose it’s no use a-goin’ no fuder,” Aunt Charity panted as she came up with them; but with the funereal habit asserting itself in spite of all weariness, added, “Sence we’re so nigh we might’s well go up an’ view th’ remains.”

So they toiled on up the last steep slope, each in silent preparation for the scene of desolation and ruin which awaited them. So they came to the hilltop, and saw on the ridge beyond, embowered in its abundant fruit trees, the unharmed Miller homestead, without so much as a smoke wreath climbing from its ample chimney. Thrice its breadth above it swam the moon a little past its full. Lot Perkins, pointing to it, said laconically: “There’s your fire!”

Uncle Peter gazed a moment in speechless disgust, and then burst out briefly, “Dumb the haouse, I wish ’t it had took afire!”

“Wal,” said Lot, getting to his feet, “sin’ the show’s over, I s’pose we might as well go hum the nighest way, you an’ I an’ Alviry, Mis’ Perkins! Now, don’t ye fergit whose wife ye be, marm, an’ go to lookin’ back, ’cause the cows hain’t ben salted an’ they might eat ye.”

Jared an Phœbe Ann lingered last, and strolled leisurely far behind the others.

“When I fust got aholt o’ that ’ere letter I was ’feared you ’d got a feller ’way off some’eres,” said Jared, after several attempts to clear his throat.

“Why, Jer’d, what ’d you care ’f I had?”

“I du care.”

“No, Jer’d, I hain’t got no feller, fur ner near.”

“Say, Phœbe Ann,” he said desperately, “if you ever do wanter git married, you need n’t never go to the ’Hio tu. Not if you could stan’ it along wi’ me.”

The love-song of the frogs was ringing again, and the insistent, monotonous trill was not broken when Jared and Phœbe Ann came slowly to the brookside, whispering infrequent words into each other’s hungry ears. Nor did it cease to shake the night air, fragrant with the warm breath of the earth and the faint aroma of the sweet-flag, when she said with a startled voice: “There, Jer’d Waite! I du b’lieve I’ve gone an’ lost that letter for good and all!”

So they went back up the hill, searching the ground, step by step, with the moonlight making one long shadow behind them.

THE SHAG BACK PANTHER

LOOKING eastward from Lake Champlain, where it is bordered by the township of Lakefield, the first eminence that catches the glance that does not overshoot to the nobler heights of the Green Mountains, far beyond, is Shag Back. All Lakefield people, who have proper town pride, speak of it as Shag Back Mountain, or, quite as often, as "the Mountain," with the same respect that Camel's Hump and Mansfield are spoken of by those who dwell in their mighty shadows. But when the mountain folk have occasion to speak of it, as they sometimes do when in its neighborhood, it is only as "that hill" or "that cobble," and, in fact, if set on a side of one of their grand familiars it would be hardly a noticeable ridge.

Forty years ago or more, Shag Back was so famous for its crops of blueberries and huckleberries, that people came to it from miles away to gather them ; but from some unknown cause these crops have failed continuously for many years.

In the fruitful years, when a nimble-fingered picker might fill a milk-pail in an hour, a French Canadian lived in a little house standing so near the foot of Shag Back that the sunrise came late

to it over the mountain's rugged crest of pines and gnarled oaks.

Théophile Dudelant was the name that parents and family had given him, but his Yankee neighbors called him Duffy Doodlelaw. He liked neither ; for the old name was too suggestive of his cast-off nationality when properly pronounced, and the attempts of New England tongues thereat sounded so oddly that people were apt to laugh when they first heard it. So he cast about for a better-sounding name, and as no one could translate for him the one he bore, he hit upon one which, to his ears, most resembled it, and presently announced that his name in English was David Douglas, by which hereafter he would be known.

Some of his transplanted Canadian friends, who, casting off with their moccasins the names of ancestors that had toiled and fought with Champlain and Frontenac, had become Littles, Shorts, Stones, Rocks, Grigwires, Greenoughs, Lovers, and what not, accepted it as genuine, and were particular to address him and speak of him as David Douglas ; but to his great disgust the Yankees continued to call him Duffy Doodlelaw. Then he felt that he had made a mistake and rechristened himself David Dudley ; but this cognomen would stick no better than the other.

He was thinking of this troublesome question of names, quite as much as of the onions he was weed-

ing, one August forenoon, when the sun's rays fell hot upon him.

"Douglas ; Dudley ; Ah do' know if *one* of it was de bes', or one of it was de bes'," he soliloquized, as, squatted in the path between the beds, he tugged at a stubborn bunch of mallows. He carried on all conversations with himself in English, perhaps to perfect himself in the language, but more likely to show his mastery of it. And he had no one else to talk with, for the two youngest children, who had been left at home while their mother and the rest went huckleberrying, had not yet arrived at intelligible speech. Now and then, when irresistibly attracted by the onions they attempted to pull one, their father would bellow hoarsely at them in French, or roar the name of the delinquent in English, but he had nothing further to say to them. He continued his self-converse undisturbed, whether they played and laughed, or fought and squalled.

"Douglas ; prob'ly dat was Dudelant. Dudley ; prob'ly *dat* was Dudelant. Which of it was saoun' de bes' ? Ah do' know, me. Good mawny, Mista Douglas !" addressing himself in his blindest voice. "Dat was saoun' pooty gooode, bah jinjo," he commented, and Mr. Douglas began to frame a polite response to himself. "Pooty well, t'ank you, Mista" — when he caught sight of a youngster just snatching an onion stalk. "Pren' garrnde !"

he roared, and the little thief scrambled away on all fours with the purloined morsel between his teeth.

Then Théophile resumed, while he tugged at the refractory weed, "Pooty well, t'ank you, Mista Dud" —, but the mallow suddenly broke or loosened its hold, and he sat down unexpectedly while the mallow's roots, flying aloft with his hands, rained a shower of dry earth upon his upturned face.

"Sss-a-cré ton sac'!" he hissed and groaned, as he got upon his feet and, wiping the dust from his eyes with the backs of both hands, turned to view the havoc he had made. "Bah jinjo! Ah 'll spilte more as half pecks onion!" he said sorrowfully. "Wal, sah, Ah guess Ah was be Mista Dudley. Mista Douglas he ain't sim for be very good lucky, — he si' daown on too much onion!"

Accepting this omen as determining his name henceforth, he was familiarizing himself with it by frequent repetitions, when he heard approaching footsteps, and voices hushing to low tones and whispers as they drew nearer.

Looking a little beyond the rough paling of his garden, he saw a pretty, fair-haired girl of sixteen years, and two small boys two and four years younger, in whose complexions and features, though sunburned and more coarsely moulded, brotherhood with her was plainly discernible. The

three looked so good-humored and happy that it seemed hardly possible for one to meet them in any other mood, but each carried a pail or basket with the evident purpose of berry-picking, and Théophile's heart was at once embittered against them, and he bent over his onions pretending to be unaware of visitors. But when the girl came up to the fence, timidly laying her hands upon it, starting shyly when the tin pail rang against the palings, and accosted him with a pleasant "Good-morning, sir," he could no longer ignore their presence, but arose and faced the honest blue eyes with profuse simulated courtesy.

"Gooode mawny, mees. Pooty gooode day dis mawny, don't it? Pooty hot, dough, an' Ah guess he 'll rain some t'under, by 'n' by, Ah guess," and he scanned the brassy sky in which there was not a promise that rain would ever fall again. "Yas, sah, he 'll rain 'fore soon, Ah b'lieve so, me."

The girl cast a questioning look toward the lake, whence summer showers oftenest came.

"Oh, dear! Do you think it will rain? My! I don't want to get wet, but I 'most wish it would rain, for father says everything needs it, and my posy garden is all dryin' up. My chiny asters is all wiltin'."

"Ah, ma poo' leetly gal!" cried Théophile, raising his outspread palms toward her, and then dropping them by his thighs. "You 'll ain't want

for git ketch in t'under, up on de mountain. De litlin was stroke more as half de tree, ev'ry tam it t'under, an' de t'under stroke more as half de tree ev'ry tam it litlin. Oh, bah jinjo! But prob'ly you 'll ain't goin' dar?"

"Oh, yes!" she said, "we've come huckle-berryin', and we wanted to ask you where the best place is; we don't know anything about the mountain."

"Goin' on de mount'in! 'Lone?" said Théophile, raising his voice in a horrified tone, with an exclamation point and an interrogation point bristling at the end of every word. "One leetly gaal an' two leetly boy? Oh, bah jinjo! you can' go! Ah can' let you went! You be all eat awp 'fore two hour! You be all tored to piecens!" and his upraised hands fell to clawing the air with hooked fingers.

The smile faded out of the girl's face as she lifted her startled eyes to Théophile's, and her parted lips framed an inarticulate "Why?"

"Was it possibly you 'll ain't hear 'baout de pant'er?" She shook her head, and her brothers, who had stood apart, fidgeting impatiently over the delay, were drawn near with quickened interest at the mention of a panther.

"Naw? Wal, bah jinjo! Dey was twenty, prob'ly forty folkses have hear it yaller! Ev'ry day, ev'ry day! Ah 'll hear it to-day, myse'f, yes,

sah! Prob'ly 'f you'll listen leetly whil', you hear it you'se'f. Dah!" lifting his left hand toward the mountain and rolling his eyes in the same direction, from whence came the snarling squall of a young crow, "ain't you'll hear dat noise?"

"That sounds jus' like a crow," the elder boy remarked, after listening a moment with held breath.

"Cr-row!" Théophile growled contemptuously. "Bah jinjo, Ah guess you ain't t'ink he was cr-row 'f he'll gat hees claw in you. Yas, sah, he could make ev'ry kan' of noise, ev'ry was be make. Like blue jay, like cr-row, like hawk, like howl, like huomans, like beebbee, w'en he'll try for foolish somebody for come near it. But you'll wan' hear it w'en he'll spik hees own language! He'll mek you hairs froze awp straight on tawp you' heads, dat time! Oh, it was dreadfully! Ma wife her'll go for try git few hawkleberree for make happlesasses for de chil'en, tudder day, an' her'll come home so scare of dat pant'er her mos' can' breev, her'll make so much run 'way from it. Her so scare naow, her ain't stay home 'mos' any, so close de mount'in. Her'll gone vees'tin' to-day and all de chil'en can walked, 'cep' de beebbee, her carry. An' one time, if you'll b'lieve, dat pant'er was 'mos' scarit me; but Ah'll ain't scare. No, sah! He gat to be more as one pant'er for scare me, Ah guess," he said, in a big voice, ending with a bellow of scornful laughter that might have made a panther's blood run cold.

“Ough, the hateful thing!” the girl shuddered, as she cast a frightened glance toward the mountain where the terrible beast was lurking. “It’s too bad! We wanted so to get some for mother. She’s kind o’ peaked this summer, and hankers after huckleberries, and we’ve come ’most three miles,” she explained to Théophile. “If there was only somebody to go with us! You could n’t, just till we could git a few?” she asked timidly, after a little struggle with her bashfulness. “Father ’d pay you; I know he would.”

Théophile felt that he had made a mistake in vaunting his bravery, for nothing was further from his purpose than to guide any one, out of his own family, to the fruitful fields that he had set the mythical panther to guard.

“It will make me so glad for go, if Ah can, but Ah can’ go an’ lef ma leetly chil’en, an’ Ah can’ take it. Oh, no, no. Ah can’ go to-day, ain’t you see? But prob’ly Ah could go some mawny very airly, an’ peek some for you, — very airly, ’fore you can gat here. Ah spec’ dough, de hawkleberrees all dry awp, he ain’t rain, so long tam.”

“Say, Lib,” said the older boy, after a long, wistful look at the steeps above, whose tops were level, with ledges fringed with a shrubby growth that promised huckleberries, “le’ ’s go up a piece; I ain’t afraid!”

"No, no," she said, in a tremor of alarm, "you must n't go a step!"

"Oh, 'fraid cat! You can stay here 'f you wan' to, an' me an' Abner 'll go. Come on, Abner," he cried, with boyish bravado, and took a few steps toward the woods; but Abner did not follow.

"Oh, Johnny," she pleaded, "be a good boy, and le' 's go home; you know we ought to."

He would not stop for being told he must, but was not at all unwilling to do so when coaxed, for he began to feel a queer sensation creeping and crawling down his back till it unpleasantly tickled his toes. A great hawk was wheeling in slow circles above the mountain and gasping out tremulous, angry cries, as if he spied some hateful intruder prowling beneath him. Perhaps he saw the panther.

"He ain't 'fred for go all 'lone, Ah know dat," said Théophile, in a wheedling tone, "but it would be weeked!—weeked! for go in so danger. An' he was good boy, Ah know by hees look of it."

"If I 'd only fetched my gun, I 'd resk anything touchin' us," said Johnny, feeling braver with the mountain behind him.

"No, sir! I guess nothing would," Abner said; and to Théophile, "He shot a fox last fall when he went huntin' with Uncle Abner, did n't you, Johnny? A real fox, sir, and big! wa' n't he, Johnny?" and Johnny nodded a modest assent,

looking down at the ant-hill he was kicking, yet casting a furtive, sidelong glance the while to note how the story of his doughty deed was received by the Canadian. He was quite disgusted that it excited no more surprise than was expressed in the remark :

“ Oh, he keel fox, hein? Wal, sah, de shoot dat will keel fox was jes’ make pant’er more madder, for hate you wus. Wal, Ah mus’ take care ma onion an’ ma beebie, or ma hwoman her’ll scol’! Ha! ha! Ah’ll more ’fred ma hwoman as Ah was ’fred pant’er. Ha! ha!”

“ Oh, dear, suz!” Elizabeth sighed, “ I s’pose we must go home. Come, boys. Good-by, Mister ——?”

“ Douglas — Dudley, Ah meant, was ma nem, David Dudley. Good-by, mees, good-by. Ah be sorry you’ll can’ gat some berree.”

When he had seen the disappointed little party climb the second fence on their homeward way, he turned again to his lazy labor, chuckling over his mean achievement. “ Pant’er on de mount’in! Oh, bah jinjo! It took David Dugley for foolish de Yankee, — ha! ha! ha-e-ee!”

Hot, tired, and disheartened, the girl and her brothers went across the fields that seemed to have doubled their weary width since they made their hopeful morning journey over them. In the pastures where the sheep stood in huddles under the

trees, with noses close to the ground, making no motion but when they kicked at the pestering flies, the dry grass was more slippery underfoot and the stubble of the shorn meadows was sharper. The piercing cry of the locusts and the husky clapping of their wings sounded more tiresome, hotter, and dryer; and they had not noticed till now that the bobolinks had lost their song and gay attire, and were gathered in little flocks along thickets of elders, raspberry bushes, and goldenrods that almost hid the fences, though they were so high as to seem almost insurmountable barriers. Here the bumble-bees droned from aster to goldenrod, from willow-herb to fireweed, after brief, fumbling explorations of each as if they found no sweet in any, and the kingbirds made hovering flights from stake to stake, vexing the weary girl with their needless alarm and causeless scolding; and, indeed, everything in nature seemed out of tune, with nothing in it satisfied, or satisfying, or pleasant or cheery. When they came to the edge of the meadow behind their own home, how far away, and like an ever-receding mirage, the red house and gray barns looked, though they could hear the hens cackling. They thought they must die of thirst before they could reach the well, though they could see the sweep slanting against the sky, and even the slender pole that hung from its tip. When at last they came near it, a tall man was

drawing up the bucket, intently watching its slow ascent with such care, as if it was bringing up his fortune and every drop was a diamond, that he did not see them till they were close upon him.

The sunburned face he turned toward them, with a little expression of surprise, wore also such habitual guise of good-nature that one would guess he could never be much at variance with anything — unless it might be work.

“Why, younkits, you back so soon? Where’s you’ baries?” seeing how lightly hung the empty pails and baskets; and then, with a little chuckle, “Wal, I swan! If you hain’t busters!” His quick eye noted how longingly theirs were bent on the dripping bucket. “Dry, be ye? Wal, this come f’m the northeast corner, an’ it’s colder’n charity. Here’s a dipperful to start on, Libby.” He passed a brimming quart to his niece, who held it while her brothers drank before she took a sip.

“Oh, Uncle Abner, there’s a panther?” Johnny gasped, when the first draught had loosened his parched tongue.

“A what?” asked the uncle, backing into an easy position against the curb.

“A panther, a real panther. Yes, sir, there is!” in earnest protest against the incredulity expressed in his uncle’s face; “on Shag Back Mountain, there is!”

“Did you see him? Wa’ n’t it a woo’ chuck?”

Uncle Abner asked, dallying with the returned dipper in a way that shocked Elizabeth's housewifely ideas of neatness.

"Oh, Uncle Abner!" cried Johnny reproachfully. "No, sir, we did n't see him, but a man told us, that's heard him, an' he's scairt everybody to death, so they dassent go there any more."

"Who's the man?"

"Wha' 'd he say his name was, Lib? Anyways, he's a Frenchman that lives up there, and he 'pears to be real clever, and candid, and was awful 'fraid we 'd go and git hurt, but I would 'f I 'd had my gun. My sakes! — if I could shoot a panther!"

"The confaounded critter!" Uncle Abner remarked, in as angry a tone as he ever used; his hearers were in some doubt whether the epithet was bestowed on the man or the panther.

"Why, Uncle Abner, you don't b'lieve the man lied?" Johnny asked, opening his eyes as wide as his mouth. There was a fascinating horror in the belief that there was a panther so near, as if the old times, that made his flesh creep when he heard stories of them, had come back, and it made him uncomfortable to have his faith shaken.

"Lie? Oh, no! That Canuck never lies," Uncle Abner replied, hardly reassuringly, "never, when he keeps his mouth shut. He would n't care haow many hucklebaries folks got, if they bought 'em o' him."

When they had detailed all they had heard of the savage invader of Shag Back, their uncle gave a little snort which expressed skepticism, if not downright unbelief, but said nothing till he had filled his water jug and corked it with a corn-cob fresh from the crib.

"Maybe, if we finish gittin' in the oats to-day, I'll go up to Shag Back with ye to-morrow, an' we'll see if we can't git a hucklebary, spite o' that painter. The confaounded critter!" And he strode away with his chuckling jug to the barn, where the hoofs of the horses could be heard pounding the floor with resounding thumps in warfare with the flies.

The young folks were as glad to have the oat field cleared that day as if the crop had been their own, for it was a great day when Uncle Abner would go with them fishing, berrying, or nutting, and they were sure, now, that a little special pleading would make his "maybe" as good as a promise.

They were not disappointed. When the sun rose next morning out of the coppery and leaden clouds which gave no promise of the rain that every one but these selfish people was wishing for, it was the same red, rayless ball that it had been for weeks, and soon after breakfast Uncle Abner, with exasperating slowness, made ready to start. In a short time the expedition set forth.

Johnny besought his uncle for leave to take his

rifle and the old hound. The dog, when he divined his master's intention of taking an outing, jumped about with delight, bellowed a sonorous entreaty to accompany him, tugging at his chain and corrugating his sorrowful brows with new lines of grief when he was bidden to stop his noise.

"No, Bub, your gun 'll be 'nough, 'an Laoud ain't a painter dawg. Shut up, Laoud, 't won't be long 'fore coonin' time, ol' feller."

The hound sat down, shifting his weight from one crooked leg to the other, as he wistfully watched the party out of sight, and then, after a few pivoting turns of imaginary nest-making, lay down with a whining sigh of disappointment.

In company with one so learned as their uncle in the lives of wild things, the way to the mountain was not long, though they often turned aside to see the deserted nest of a bird or the bird itself, when they heard an unfamiliar note. Sometimes it was a jay, uttering of his many cries one that they had never heard before. Sometimes a cat-bird practicing some new mimicry in the seclusion of a fence-side thicket; and once, when the squalls of a shrike drew them to a wide-spreading thorn-tree, their uncle showed them an impaled sparrow that the little gray and black butcher had hung in his leaf-roofed shambles.

The veil of distance and the droughty haze that revealed the mountain only as a velvety gray-green

bound of the horizon, dissolved in an hour, and the steeps arose just before them, clad in the individual tints of trees, each wearing such greenness as the pitiless sky had left it.

Without coming in sight of the Canadian's house, they entered the woods at the open door of the Notch, and, near the brook that had grown faint and almost voiceless in the parching heat, they fortified themselves for further journeying by draughts from a famous cold spring, the scarcely melted out-flow of a far-away ice-bed, creeping from under a mossy rock into the light of day, — a distillation of the heart of the mountain with a subtle flavor of the hidden inner world, and so cold that the scant measure of a birch-bark cupful made their throats ache.

Then they went along on a wood-road, which wound hither and thither with such gradual turns that the children soon so completely lost all knowledge of the points of the compass that the dim shadows of the trees pointed for them to the southeast, and the puffs of south wind bent the hemlock tips away from the north. But their uncle's fox-hunting had taken him so many times to Shag Back that he knew every nook and corner of it, all the favorite runways of foxes, and, as well, on what ledges and slopes the huckleberries flourished best, for in the first October days of hunting they had not yet all fallen off with the reddening leaves. To such

a place he led them, and presently they were so busy with picking that the panther was almost forgotten.

It very naturally happened that on the same morning Théophile Dudelant went, by a different way, to the same place ; for no one knew better than he where the bushes were most heavily laden with the fruit he had set the panther of his own creation to keep others from gathering. His conscience was not quite benumbed by all the strokes and smotherings it had received in the forty years (during which he could scarcely recall a time when it had not had the worst of his wrestlings with it), and it gave him some faint twinges now and then as he remembered the disappointment of his yesterday's visitors, — twinges that he allayed by a promise uttered aloud to himself.

“Bah jinjo! Ah will take some nicest berree Ah can fin' to dat folkses, an' sol' it cheap! Yas, sah, *pooty* cheap; jes' 'nough for paid for ma tam an' troublesome; twelve cen' a quart, Ah guess, an' take ma paid in pork — if he ain't ask too much!” And thus he excused his invention of an enemy: “Wal, dey was ma berree, ain't it? Dat was ma orchard, ain't it? Yas, sah! Dey ain't let me go in *dey* orchard for happles w'en Ah want it, an' Ah 'll ain't let dey go in *ma* orchard, if Ah can help it, bah jinjo! An', sah, dey maght be pant'er, prob'ly.

Dey was goode place for it, an' dey don't wan' deir chillen all tore up to piecens ; an' prob'ly dey lay it to me. Yas, sah ! It was a very good place for pant'er raght here ! ”

Indeed it was — here under low, branching pines where twilight brooded throughout the sunniest day over the dun, noiseless mat of fallen needles, so like a panther in color that one might crouch upon it unseen ten paces away ; so soft that even a careless footfall would be unheard at half the distance. It was such a likely place for a panther to lurk in, that he shivered, in spite of the heat which penetrated even these shades, when he heard approaching footsteps and the swish of saplings and branches recovering their places, and stood aghast till he saw a straw hat (of his wife's manufacture) ; and then a neighbor's face appeared above the undergrowth that choked the path.

“ Hello, Duffy ! ” cried a reassuring voice, in a tone expressing as much disappointment as surprise, “ I thought you was my yearlin's when I heard ye. Hain't seen 'em, hev ye ? I been rum-magin' the hull maountain arter 'em, an' can't find hide ner hair on 'em. Guess suthin' 's eat 'em up — a painter, er suthin'. Mebby a tew-legged painter ! But ye know there was a reg'lar painter scairt a gal onct aouten her seben senses, right clus to where we be, not sech a turrible while ago. Oh, thirty, forty year, mebby. Yes,” stooping to

look beneath the low boughs toward a spring that bubbled up in the shade of the pines, at the edge of an old clearing, "right there, at the spring, she was a-bleaching a web o' cloth. Guess he's come back an' got my young cattle, for I can't find 'em. Goin' baryin', be ye? Wal, I've seen sights on 'em this mornin'. If you see them yearlin's, — a brindle steer an' tew red heifers, — you let me know, Duffy."

The cattle hunter lightly dismissed the subject of panthers and went his way, but it had made its impression on Théophile.

There had once been a panther here, and why might there not be one now? The possibility so constantly presented itself, that he could think of nothing else when he had come to his berry patch, and he listened long, and carefully scanned the bordering thickets before he began picking.

Years ago the scant growth of wood had been cut from an acre or two of this eastering slope, and the thin soil nourished now only a knee-deep thicket of huckleberry bushes and sweet-ferns. The woods sloped to it on the upper side, a dense growth of low pines pierced with tremulous spires of young poplars and slender trunks of sapling birches traced in thin, broken lines of white against the dark ever-greens. A deep, narrow hollow ran along its lower easterly edge, always dark with the shade of pines and balsam firs, a little colony of which had estab-

lished itself here, far from the home of the parent stock. Down this hollow the scant outflow of a spring trickled almost noiselessly among liverwort and moss, from tiny pool to pool where ripples quivered with the blazing reflections of cardinal-flowers, like inverted lambent flames.

Théophile had seen it a hundred times, but it had never before occurred to him that it was just the lurking place a panther might choose, — where he might lie in wait for prey, or rest unseen and undisturbed and quench the thirst begotten by his horrible feasts. The intermittent dribble of the rill sounded terribly like the slow lapping of a great cat; what seemed but the stir of a leaf might be a footfall of his stealthy approach: the accidental snapping of a dry twig, perhaps, by a squirrel; a rustle of last year's leaves, made by a covey of partridges; the sudden shiver of a sapling, struck, perhaps, by a falling, rotted limb, might all be signs of his presence as he crept near, with cruel, eager eyes, measuring the certain distance of a deadly spring. The songs of the birds were hushed, as if the singers were awed to silence by some baleful presence. No bird voice was heard but the discordant squalling of a jay, raised in alarmed and angry outcry against some intruder, — a fox or an owl, perhaps, — but there were possibilities that his sharp eyes had discovered something far more dreadful than these, prowling in the black shadows. The

shifting sunlight and shadow on a withered pine-bush gave it the semblance of a living, moving object too large and tawny to be a fox, and Théophile held his breath and listened to the beating of his heart, till a long look had assured him how harmless a thing it was. He tried to laugh at his causeless alarm, but the sound of his mirthless laughter was so strange that it gave him new affright.

If any eyes were upon him, they could not but note his trepidation when he often withheld his trembling hands from the drooping clusters of fruit, and bent a strained ear to listen to a sigh of the wind, the rustle of a leaf, the flutter of a bird, or the stir of some shy inhabitant of the woods, and scanned again and again the bounds of its mysterious shades, often standing up to look behind him.

The scarcely broken silence, an awed, expectant hush of nature, the sense of being there alone to face whatever might come, were so hard to bear that he promised himself he would stay no longer than to half fill his pail ; and long before that was done he wished for the company of his worthless cur, and began to invent a story of sudden sickness to excuse an immediate retreat.

The drip of the tiny rill seemed to cease in a moment of ominous silence, then a poplar shivered in a sudden puff of hot wind that died away in a gasping sigh among the pines.

There was a crash of twigs in the edge of the

woods, and a frightened partridge hurtled across the clearing, too bewildered to notice him or turn aside for him ; and then a fiendish yell rent the air, — such a terrific outbreak of discordant sound that for an instant all power of motion sank out of him, while he stood frozen with terror — but only for an instant.

Then, with a smothered cry of dread, he sprang away, instinctively taking the path he had followed thither. His foot caught in a root and he fell headlong, dropping his pail and spilling his berries, but still continuing his flight on all fours till he got again upon his feet, and then ran on and on at such speed as he had never made before, only halting when the woods were half a mile behind him and he dropped exhausted on a pasture knoll and in painful gasps recovered his spent breath.

When Uncle Abner had sent a final terrific screech tearing through the woods after the flying Canadian, his part in the play was ended. Before the echoes of the unearthly cry had faded, in slow pulsations, out of the hot air, he led his little party forth from their hiding-place to the windrow of spilled berries.

“ We ’ll leave him his pail, if he ever dares to come arter it ; but it ’ould be tew bad t’ hev these big ripe baries wasted,” he said, as he and the children scooped them by handfuls into their own half-filled pails.

Though it is not reported that Shag Back was ever again visited by a panther, the dread of such a visit abode with Théophile, till dew and rain and snow had rusted his pail out of all use but to excite the curiosity of such as happened to come upon it, — when each one's fancy accounted in its own way for the cause of its abandonment.

A STORY OF THE OLD FRONTIER

NEAR the southern border of Vermont a little brook leaps and races down the hills to an intervale, through which it creeps in devious windings to a tributary of the Connecticut. One unacquainted with the industries of the pioneer settlers might be puzzled to account for the origin of its name, Potash Brook, which it has borne since the first settler here gathered the ashes of the fallow burnings and turned them to account in the manufacture of a marketable commodity.

One hundred and fifty years have passed since Simeon Draper made a clearing and built a rude potashery on the bank of the brook, half a mile up the larger stream from his home. It consisted of a rough stone chimney and fireplace, in which a great potash kettle was set sheltered by a bark-roofed shed that was inclosed with logs on three sides. Near this and close by the brook, for the sake of the necessary water, three leach tubs, sawn from large hollow elms, stood on a slanting platform of hewn plank or puncheons, from which the lye dripped into a great log trough, and near by was the important ash bin, carefully roofed.

Simeon Draper and his son, Stephen, a lad of thirteen, tended the works by day, as far as possible, when there was less of the always imminent danger of murder or capture by prowling bands of Canadian Indians. One or the other dreadful fate was predicted by the less venturesome settlers who lived farther down the valley nearer the shelter of the fortified blockhouse; but Simeon, brave to the verge of foolhardiness, and impelled by the hope of a bountiful reward, declared that he would not abandon the enterprise until obliged to do so by something more than fear of danger.

One forenoon early in May, after a busy night, Simeon stood regarding the boiling kettle with critical satisfaction for a moment before speaking to his son.

“Now, Stevy, I’ll go to the house an’ fetch some dinner an’ supper, an’ fill the vinegar bottle that’s e’enamost empty. We’ll need it bad if we get a speck o’ potash or a drop o’ lye spattered in our eyes. You keep the kittle a-wollopin’, for we want to ‘salts down’ afore dark, so’s not to have to stay here over night, only don’t let it bile over. You need n’t put no more water on the leaches, for the lye is gittin’ so weak it won’t sca’cely bear an egg now; you won’t have nothin’ to do but keep the fire goin’ an’ the kittle from b’ilin’ over, an’, of course, keep an eye out for Injuns. I don’t b’lieve there’s one in fifty mile, but if you see any sign, clipper for

home. I 'll leave the gun wi' you an' 'll be back to rights," and taking the empty vinegar bottle, he set forth at a brisk pace along the footpath.

Stephen fed another stick of wood to the roaring fire and then went to the back of the shanty, where the long-barreled smoothbore leaned in a corner, from which he lifted it and fondled it with more than mere boyish admiration of a firearm, for now it was his sole companion and faithful protector. He rested it across the projecting end of a log of the side wall, and took a long aim at an imaginary Indian in the form of a stump on the rocky hillside beyond the leach tubs, then drew a finer bead on a moose flower that shone in bright relief against a black shadow, and wished that he might prove his marksmanship by actual test. But such a waste of precious ammunition was not to be thought of, even if the report would not be certain to bring his father hurrying back in needless alarm. As a bear would not shamle forth nor a wolf sneak into the open from the woodside where a company of jays were berating some object of their dislike, he contented himself with opening the pan and examining the priming and adding a few grains of powder from the engraved powder horn given his father in Connecticut.

A premonitory slop of lye on the hot embers hastily summoned him to his duty. He partially quelled the riotous liquid by vigorous dipping and

pouring with the long-handled dipper. He paused in his work to listen to an unfamiliar bird song that caught his ear above the crackling roar of the fire and the muffled wolloping of the kettle and the churning of the little waterfall in its hollow basin. It was a merrier sound even than the babble of the brook or the musical tinkle of the lye in the great trough, for it was the song of the first bobolink that had discovered the new clearing, rejoicing over its desolation of blackened stumps and withered fireweed wherein, perhaps, it saw the greenness and bloom of future summer meadows. Three years had passed since the young pioneer heard a bobolink singing its blythe chorus in the sunny fields of old Connecticut, and it brought an ache of yearning for the pleasanter and easier life in the older settlement. Yet it was a signal of conquest well begun, and a promise of victory over savage nature. The boy's abstracted gaze rested on the scathed clearing, the brook, robbed of all its beauty and choked with brush, the greening border of the forest, — seeing instead of these a vision of smooth meadows and pastures and a clear stream winding between green banks. The turmoil of the boiling lye recalled him to his duty, and he began dipping and pouring again, too intent upon his work to look behind him for the cause of a nearer outbreak of clamor from the jays. A moment later a smart tap on the shoulder made him turn his head with a

sudden start, which was succeeded by a sinking horror when he found himself in the presence of two stalwart Indians. The face of the nearest wore an almost good-natured expression as he regarded Stephen's consternation and complete helplessness. The other was a wicked-looking savage, whose beady little eyes glittered with a snaky, murderous light, and he fingered his tomahawk in his belt as if he could hardly restrain the desire to use it.

"Boy no good watchum camp," said the first, broadening his grin. "Injun ketch now. Boy walk in woods 'long me. Me makum good Injun."

As he spoke he handled a thong of moose hide, the use of which Stephen understood, and to "walk the woods" he knew meant to be taken through the wilderness to Canada. Both Indians cast furtive glances upon the boiling lye with a curiosity their stoicism could not conceal, until abandoning the attempt the spokesman asked, pointing to the kettle:

"What call um? Pastoniack make um lum?"

Impelled by an impulse of self-preservation, the consequences of which he did not pause to consider, Stephen answered:

"Yes, yes! Want to drink some?" and raised the half-filled dipper with a gesture of invitation.

Both stooped toward the proffered draught, each blowing at the steam and shrinking a little from immediate contact with the hot vessel. A means of

escape flashed through the boy's mind which he put in execution as soon as conceived. Withdrawing the dipper a little, he flung the contents full in the faces of the Indians, then leaping out at the opposite side of the shed, he sprang away at full speed for home.

The Indian on the farther side received the larger share of the scalding caustic fairly in the face, and was completely blinded by it, while the other was struck upon one side and made immediate use of his uninjured eye to take a flying shot at Stephen. Half blinded, wholly surprised and tortured with excruciating pain, his aim was wild, and the ball went whistling high over Stephen's head. His companion, bewildered by the sudden blindness and suffering torture as exquisite as any his people had ever inflicted on their captives, groped away from the noise of the fire and seething kettle till the sound of the running brook caught his ear, when he staggered toward it and plunged into the water.

Simeon Draper, alarmed by the report of the gun, was hurrying back with provisions, the refilled vinegar bottle, and the spare gun from the house, when he was met by his son, who with few words told of his adventure. Stealthily approaching the camp by a circuitous route, they discovered the Indians still at the brook and so engaged in bathing their injured faces and with but one eye between them to apprise them of danger, that they were easily captured.

There was small chance of escape when one half-blind man had to lead another totally blind, and they submitted stoically to their fate, whatever it might be.

"Red water burn plenty bad," said the spokesman. "Water no put um out."

Draper gave him the vinegar and directed him to bathe his own and his comrade's eyes with it, which, though it smarted terribly for a time, stopped the biting of the caustic and gave grateful relief.

Then Stephen, with the long smoothbore, stood guard over the captives while his father completed the boiling down of the lye to "black salts." This was set to cool and harden in a smaller kettle. Then as the sun was going down, with their prisoners before them, they marched home, hungry as wolves, for the pork and cornbread had been fairly divided with the Indians, whose appetite seemed unimpaired by their misfortunes.

Great was the surprise and thankfulness of Patience Draper when she saw her husband and son returning, safe and unharmed, although accompanied by the two savages; for she had heard the gun, and had passed two hours of such agonizing dread as frontier life often brought to womankind. The deliverance gained by her son's bold stroke aroused her devout thankfulness, yet her womanly heart pitied the suffering plight of the stolid captives, and she dressed their wounds as carefully as

if these men were friends and not the relentless foes of her people.

The news of Stephen's exploit soon spread among the scattered settlers, and they came to seek confirmation of the story by sight of the captives, with their heads bandaged by good Mistress Draper, whose kindness met slight approval from most of the visitors.

"If I'd ha' ketched 'em, I'd jest ha' knocked 'em in the head wi' my axe or beetle," declared old Ephraim Long, who had been a scalp hunter and had borne a part in Lovewell's famous fight. "Sarve Injuns that sass an' they won't never pester nob'dy ag'in."

The opinion of the majority of the settlers coincided with that of "ol' man Long," yet Patience Draper continued her benevolent work, and the condition of the captives improved so rapidly that the neighbors predicted they would soon be able to murder their benefactors and then make their escape, and all increased their vigilance and strengthened their means of protection. The silent Indian indeed seemed vicious enough to fulfill the prophecy if he had the power, but the other made simple and apparently sincere expressions of gratitude.

"You good squaw. Me Cap'n Joe," he said, standing erect and pounding the breast of his blanket coat with his fist. "Me fight, plenty. Me ketch Pastoniac, plenty. Make um walk woods.

Me big man, Dodosun," pointing to his comrade, "him good sojer; fight Pastoniack, ketch plenty. Him big man, bese big men. Lee'l Pastoniack boy, half so big, ketch um bese of it. Ugh! Dat shame, plenty," and he laughed as if he relished the joke, but the unbandaged lower half of Dodosun's face looked savagely sullen.

Simeon Draper had no fear of his captives' attempting to escape in their present condition, and maintained a loose guard over them. So it happened later on, that he awoke one morning to find them gone, so long departed that they must be far beyond the verge of the forest, in which it would be as useless to search for them as for a mouse in a straw stack. Except for their value as exchanges for English captives, and that they had carried away one of the guns, he was not sorry to be rid of them.

The prediction of the older settlers was verified in part and its completion still expected, yet for two years the frontier remained undisturbed, except by rumors of threatened attack. But one midsummer day when the men folks were all at work in the meadows, in such fancied security that but few had carried their guns with them, a strong band of Waubankees suddenly swooped down upon the place, killed and scalped one man, wounded and captured another, and carried off three women and five children, among whom were Patience Draper

and her youngest child, a little girl not two years old. No attack was made on the blockhouse, where the families at once took shelter, and from which all but a small guard of able-bodied men set forth in pursuit of the marauders, under the lead of Sergeant Ephraim Long. After a sharp pursuit twenty miles up the river, the Indians were about to be overtaken when they sent back one of the captured children with the threat that if they were attacked they would at once put all the captives to death. Some of the rescue party were for giving no heed to this, but a majority, among whom were those whose wives and children were in jeopardy, were unwilling to risk its execution, and it was decided to abandon the chase.

The Indians continued their route by what was known as the "Indian road" up the West or Wantastequet River, then across the "height of land" to Otter Creek, where their canoes had been secreted. In these they now embarked with their plunder and captives, to the great relief of the latter, who had been hurried over the rough trail in constant fear that some of the little children would give out and be murdered by the savages, according to their well-known custom. No one of the unhappy company suffered the horror of this fear more keenly than Patience Draper, whose little girl was the youngest of the captives, and least able to endure the hardships of the journey. For many weary

miles the mother had carried the child, till she was in danger of bringing upon herself the fatal stroke, the more dreaded because it would leave the child among the savages without her care and protection.

Embarked in the canoes, in comparative bodily comfort, the party glided steadily down the river, winding through the ancient forest past shores that showed no trace of former human presence save in the worn trail of carrying places, past rock-torn rapids and thunderous cataracts. Passing the last and greatest of these, at what is now Vergennes, they glided for miles down a wide, deep channel so devious that it well deserves the name Peconktuk, "Crooked River," by which it was known to the Waubanakees as well as by the name of Wona-kahketuk, "Otter River." At length they came to the broad expanse of Petowbowk, the beautiful lake of Champlain. Here they landed on a low promontory sloping gently to the river from the rock-walled lakeward shore. In front the ragged steeps of a mountain arose from the water's edge. Far to the northward, beyond jutting capes of rock and forest, lake and sky met where dim islands lay like clouds stranded between them. To the southward the blue waters seemed compassed by low shores and sheer walls of mountain. In all the extended scene there was no sign of human life but in the brief encampment of the marauders.

The next morning the Indians held an unintel-

ligible consultation, which resulted in their embarkation for the southward. Coasting along the eastern shore, after two hours of continuous paddling, they saw before them the emblazoned lilies of France floating over the citadel of Fort St. Frederick, and half an hour later they landed on the beach near the western walls of the fortress.

Here a motley company of French soldiers, Indians of both sexes and all ages, and a similar throng of Canadians from the adjacent village, were gathered to receive the comers with various expressions of satisfaction. The Frenchmen tempered theirs with pity for the unfortunate captives, the Canadians vociferously jabbered inquiries and comments, the Indians uttered yells of triumph, and the squaws crowded about the prisoners, taunting and mocking them, and were only withheld from actual violence by the interposition of a French officer.

Patience noticed one Indian attentively regarding her, with the only eye that he possessed, by which and by his scarred face she presently recognized her old acquaintance, Captain Joe. She started and would have spoken, but with unmoved countenance he turned his back upon her and stalked away with his squaw following three paces behind him.

“An Indian’s gratitude!” she sighed, and then grew sick with fear that vengeance might be wreaked

on her and her little daughter for the cruel way her son had defended himself against Captain Joe and Dodosun. With this dread added to her dismal forebodings of a long and miserable captivity, she was led away with her fellow prisoners to the fort, where by direction of the officer they were placed in a comfortable though dungeon-like apartment, and supplied with abundant food. Here they were left to themselves, except when some inquisitive visitor came to stare at them. Once a black-robed priest, with a crafty, smooth-shaven face, stole in, cat-like, and closely scanned each face, dwelling with open admiration upon the pretty features of little Nancy Draper.

“She is a child of great beauty,” he said in English. “We will place her in the convent and the good sisters shall make her to be a Christian.”

Patience drew the child closer, as if to shield her from a fate so abhorrent to her own belief, and the priest passed on.

At night, a small lamp hanging on the wall was lighted and the captives laid themselves down on a litter of straw on the stone floor, the most comfortable beds they had enjoyed since their captivity, and soon all were asleep, save Patience, whose anxieties were too great for repose. Some time had elapsed when she saw an Indian cautiously and noiselessly enter the door, followed by a squaw and pappoose, both closely wrapped in a

blanket. To her surprise and alarm they came directly to her, and the man said in a low voice : —

"Come 'long me. Me take you. Dlap'er. You know me. Cap'n Joe. Me no forgit flien'. Put um squaw blanket on. Cov'el up lee'l' gal. Come."

The squaw threw off her blanket, and Patience saw that what she supposed was a pappoose concealed beneath it was only a make-believe bundle. She hesitated a moment, then arose and took her sleeping child in her arms, when the blanket was thrown over both, covering her head so as to conceal her color and features from casual observation. As Patience followed the Indian she saw that already the squaw was quietly stretched in her own place on the floor.

They passed a French soldier who stood on guard outside the door, but he barely noticed their exit, so freely were the Indians permitted to come and go. Her guide led on through several rooms and passages to a stone staircase, descending to a heavy, oaken door, where a white-coated soldier stood under arms with a lantern at his feet. At a word from the Indian he unbarred and opened the great door, holding the lantern to light the way down another short flight of stone steps to the water gate of the fortress, where the glitter of wavelets shone at their feet. A canoe was lying there, and at a motion of her companion Patience stepped into it, when he drew the stern toward him and got on board.

"My brother and sister go forth late," the soldier said, speaking in French, as he stood holding the lantern at the head of the stairs.

"To spy the Pastoniac, squaw sell um baskets," the Indian answered laconically.

"Oh, I comprehend," the soldier laughed softly. "My brother is a fox. Good voyage."

The Indian turned the canoe and paddled straight away till the clang of the closing door was heard and the light of the lantern no longer shone out on the lake. Then changing his course to the southward and tending toward the eastern shore, he paddled swiftly and silently until the fortified windmill south of the fort loomed darkly against the sky behind them.

"Pastoniac squaw no 'flaid?"

"No, Cap'n Joe, not of you."

"All safe w'en we by Carillon, s'pose we no meet Iliquois. No hunt um white squaw. Kill um Waubanakee. My folks plenty mad w'en fin' um squaw gone — pappoose gone. No kill um, Cap'n Joe. Cap'n Joe good sojer. Dey t'ink we go oder way. Me only 'flaid Iliquois."

At last they saw before them the lights glancing from the embrasures of Fort Carillon. Enjoining perfect silence, Captain Joe kept the canoe still closer within the shadow of the uneven shore, till the fortress lights shone like stars far behind them, and the musical monotone of the neighboring cas-

cade fell to a distant murmur. At length they entered a river-like channel, seemingly wide in the illusion of dim starlight, yet was but a slender waterway between rushy borders. Into one of these masses of rank growth, the Indian suddenly drove the canoe by one vigorous stroke of his paddle, whispering:

“Stoop low! Canoe comin’.”

Wondering by what sense he had discovered its approach, Patience peering through the palings of rushes saw it glide past like some ghostly craft, so noiselessly was it propelled by four dusky figures, from one and another of whom an occasional low-spoken word fell in a harsher tongue than the liquid dialect of the Waubanakee. When the wake of the canoe no longer stirred the water growth beside him, Captain Joe whispered:

“Iliquois go scout ’loun’ Carillon. No git um Cap’n Joe scalp dis time.” Then backing the light craft into the channel, he resumed the voyage.

As the eastern stars began to pale in the light of morning, he turned into a channel whose devious course, covered with lily pads, barely gave passage to the canoe. Now a heron launched itself awkwardly into the air within the canoe’s length of the prow, now a flock of summer ducks sprang to swifter and noisier flight before it, and now a deer, disturbed at its early feast of lily pads, splashed and floundered through water and mire to the shelter of the

forest, uttering loud whistles of alarm, till at a place where water and shore met, the voyage at length ended.

The canoe was carefully secreted, and after a couple of hours of sleep and a breakfast provided from the Indian's pack, the party began a weary journey through the forest, wearisome even to the hardened muscles of the Indian, for much of the way he carried little Nancy upon his shoulder. Without other adventure than the hardship incident to such travel, they came to the upper waters of the Otter, and in a hidden canoe made an easier stage of their journey. After another long march on the trail of the "Indian road," toward the close of an August day the light of a clearing broke through the twilight of the forest before them, where, with inexpressible joy and thankfulness, Patience Draper saw the smoke of her own chimney drifting up toward the evening sky, and at the farther end of the stump-blackened meadow saw her husband at work, and on the rude ox cart with its lading of new hay a lesser figure she doubted not was her son.

"Way good, now," said her faithful guide. "Me no go further. He see me, ol' Long shoot me, mebbby. Goo'-by."

"No, no, go with me! Come home an' eat an' sleep an' rest. No one shall hurt you. I'll tell them all how good you are. Come on."

With some hesitation he made as if to follow, and she hurried forward, leading her child. Speaking and getting no answer, she looked back, but caught only a glimpse of Captain Joe as he vanished in the shadowy verge of the forest, and so passed forever from her sight and ken, but never from her grateful remembrance.

McINTOSH OF VERGENNES

BEFORE the name of Vergennes had been transplanted from France to the northern wilds of America, the place where Vermont's oldest city now stands was only known by the name of its most distinctive natural feature, — to English speaking white men as the First Falls of Otter Creek, to Waubanakee Indians as Netahmepuntuk or Netahmekaneek, the First Falls or Carrying Place.

To these last it was a manifestation of the power of the Great Spirit who had set this impassable wall of water to bar the way of canoes in summer, the easy path of snowshoe and toboggan in winter. To the first white soldiers and hunters who saw it, it was doubtless most notable as a vexatious obstruction of navigation. Yet one soldier who saw it recognized its great possibilities. This warrior was a canny Scot, with an eye to something more substantial than military glory, and he hastened to secure this and other water power on the river, by obtaining from the governor of New York a grant of Great Otter Creek from its mouth to the Grand Falls, later known as Sutherland Falls, and of a tract of land extending the same distance along its course, three miles in width.

To hold this claim, which was disputed by some to whom the same lands had been granted by the governor of New Hampshire, he had established a doughty countryman of his, named Donald McIntosh, and had begun the building of a sawmill. Donald was a soldier who had taken part in Cullo-den's bloody fight — whether under king or Pretender tradition saith not, though his name would place him among the adherents of the latter, and he had seen rough service in America. Therefore he was quite at home now in the blockhouse that stood on a hill not far below the falls, and was his fort and dwelling. Its thick walls of hewn logs were pierced with loopholes for musketry, and the heavy door and the shutters of the few windows were of oak thickly studded with nails, and looked as if they might withstand any assault of small arms.

The cleared space that stretched only a short musket-shot away on every side between it and the woods, bore so few signs of tillage as to have more the appearance of a military than an agricultural purpose, and but for a few good old-fashioned Scotch flowers that Dame McIntosh had blooming in summer time beside the doorstep, there was hardly an exterior indication of a woman's presence.

One April day, something more than a hundred and fifty years ago, the blockhouse was garrisoned,

as it had been for months, only by Donald McIntosh and his household, consisting of himself, his wife, and their three stout sons; for Colonel Reid's other workmen, a dozen or more Scotchmen, had gone southward in the fall.

In the spring, when lake and river were open, they would return in boats with supplies and fixtures for the mills, for it was the colonel's intention to erect a grist-mill also. There were no grists to be ground yet, but he foresaw that there would be, and he meant to be ready to toll them. The skeleton frame of the sawmill perched on the brink of the cataract, and the beginning of a clearing near it, an insignificant breach in the long line of forest wall, were the only signs that the hand of civilized man had begun to break the savage wildness of the place. A great raft of driftwood, piled and interlocked in fantastic and inextricable confusion, choked the western channel at the head of the fall. Ragged cedars, whose trunks bore the scars of a century's assault of ice and flood-wood, leaned out from rocky banks and islet over the boiling, tumbling rush of waters, the cadence of whose mighty voice, always grand and solemn, was ever sinking and swelling with the varying wafts of wind. Columns of mist arose from the seething cauldron at the foot of the falls and stalked slowly away into the forest, vanishing as they swept along like a never-ending procession of majestic spectres.

The long, tortuous miles of ice that stretched far away through the forest toward the Green Mountains were slowly shortening where, just above the falls, cake after cake was breaking away, floating at first with slow reluctance, then swifter and swifter till it trembled one moment on the glassy verge, then plunged down the torn and foaming precipice of water, the crash of its downfall indistinguishable in the thunderous roar of the cataract.

Donald was standing with his sons on the hillside, watching through narrow wooded vistas the wild turmoil of the flood, when he caught sight of a man just above the falls. He was afloat on a great ice floe that was fast sweeping toward its awful plunge, running to and fro upon it, vainly seeking some way of escape from the terrible abyss that yawned before him.

“For the luve o’ God, lads!” Donald shouted to his sons, “see yon mon comin’ to his death! God hae mercy on him; for nae warldly power can save him!”

Just as the foremost edge of the floe touched the brink of the falls, the unfortunate man, who by his dress they took to be an Indian, cast his gun and pack upon it, and rushing to the upstream edge leaped from it. He was lost to their sight, and not till the floe, overhanging the brink by half its length for a moment, had plunged crashing down the raging steep, did they catch another glimpse of

him. For an instant they saw him wildly struggling in the first unbroken curve of the falling water, and then the dark object that shot down the wall of foaming water so swiftly that, when seen at all, it was but an indistinguishable streak, might be he or it might be a log of flood-wood. It mattered little, they thought, for the man who went down that fall must be as lifeless as a log when cast into the whirl of madly tossing waves at its foot.

“Puir deevil!” Donald said, sighing out his long held breath, “he has ta’en his last look o’ this warld! Oh, but it’s a sair sight to see e’en a puir heathen body like him gaun to his death, an’ we as helpless as bairns to save him! But look!” he continued, after intently scanning the broad foam-flecked pool, and pointing to a dark object that was tossed along in the sweep of an eddy, “is na that him? By the pikers of war! I think sae! Come, John, Sandy, Donald, let us awa’ in the canoe and get his puir mangled body till we gie it decent burial. It’s a’ we can do for him now.”

So saying he led the way to the shore where a large log canoe was lying. Launching it, he and John paddled lustily away to the rescue of the body. They were none too quick, for the eddy had cast it out of its current as if tired of so poor a plaything, and it was rapidly drifting toward the unbroken ice below and would soon be swept under.

“By the pikers o’ war!” cried Donald, as their

stout pull brought the canoe near the object of their pursuit, "the puir heathen saul is in its body yet!"

It was even so. The Indian was keeping himself afloat by strokes feebly delivered with the last surviving human instinct, self-preservation.

"Let me get a grip o' his black pow an' I'll haud his head abune water whiles I tow him ashore. There, pull awa' now, John; ye'll hae to do it yer ain sel'. An' there's his pack bobbin' toward us! Easy, lad, till I tak' it aboard; nae doubt there'll be gude beaver and otter fur in it, an' who kens but I may buy them o' him for a vera reasonable consideration, if he gets weel o' his drownin', an' if he does nae, why we'll e'en tak' it for salvage an' to pay the expenses o' the funeral. It's nae like there'll be heirs claimin' it."

From the moment that Donald had laid hold of his long black locks, the Indian had ceased all motion of his own and suffered himself to be towed along by the hair as quiescently as if all life had departed from his body. When the canoe grounded on the bank and his knees touched the bottom, he strove to rise and help himself, but he was too much hurt and exhausted by his fearful struggle, and so chilled to the marrow by the icy water, that he sank in a helpless heap half in the water, half on land.

"Tak' him up, lads," said Donald, "an' lay him on yon bank, where the sun shines warm, an' throw

your coats ower him. An' Donald, ye lang-legged loon, run to the house an' fetch the bottle o' whuskey, an' bid your mither warm a bed. Run as if Auld Hornie was chasin' ye. But mind, lad!" as Donald sprang away, "nae the mickle ane; the wee green glass ane. 'T wad be a sin to pour a quart o' precious mountain dew intill a heathen body that wad na ken the differ twixt that an' Yankee rum. A yill's aneugh. An' now, John an' Sandy, get poles for a litter, for I fear the puir drowned deevil's banes are broken. Lord! to think o' flesh an' bluid comin' ower that fearfu' linn alive!"

Donald soon returned with the flask of precious whiskey, and his father at once administered an unstinted dram to the Indian. As the potent liquor began to warm his blood, he opened his eyes and grunted, "Good! good!"

"Ye may weel say that, mon," said Donald, "for the likes o' 't ne'er warmed your weam afore, I'se warrant ye. A drap o' 't is worth a gallon o' the Yankee molasses brew you're like best acquaint wi'. Though I'll admit e'en that stuff is more wholesome than sic a deal o' water as ye hae had the day. Water," Donald said, continuing the consideration of the subject while he busied himself with the preparation of the litter, "is a fine invention o' the Almighty, an' I dinna ken what the warld wad be wi'out it; but naebody wants a bellyful o' 't forced intill him agen his will. An' it's an objection to't

that folk will be gettin' drowned in 't, which canna be said o' whuskey, though they tell o' an English prince that was drowned in a butt o' wine by his ain choice. I'm thinking the puir prince was daft that he didna choose gude Scotch whuskey for the purpose. He'd hae thought himsel in the land o' the leal at the first souze. But let us put the mon on the litter an' tak' him hame."

They placed the Indian on the rude litter and the four easily bore him at a good pace along the wide pathway cut through the woods from the river to the house, to which he was presently brought, undressed, and laid in the bed the gude wife had warmed for him, doubtless the most luxurious couch he had ever lain in.

No bones were broken as Donald had feared, and though the poor fellow had suffered some severe bruises which were likely to prevent his traveling for some weeks to come, he was soon able to talk. Then, by the few English words at his command, helped out by many expressive signs, he made them understand that he had been trapping far up the river and was on his way home to Canada when, for the sake of the better walking the ice afforded, he had ventured too near the open water. Unaware, till too late, that the ice had broken away above him, he passed through the perilous adventure they had witnessed, losing his gun, traps, and as he supposed, all the peltry of a month's trapping.

His face was slow to express any emotion, but it brightened with pleased surprise when his beaver and otter skins were shown him, not one missing and all nicely dried in as good condition as when packed. Donald had not the New Englander's hatred of Indians, indeed he had quite as much liking for them as for Yankees, who were too sharp at a bargain to please him. Therefore this man was as carefully nursed and as well treated as if his skin had been as white and his hair as red as Donald's own.

He was soon able to sit outdoors on the sunny side of the house and weave pretty baskets for the gude wife, and presently got into the woods, where he found medicinal herbs to cure his inward and outward hurts, whereupon he mended rapidly; and when the gray of the woods began to take on the tender green of newly opened leaves, and the forest's brown floor was dappled with thousands of white moose-flowers, he began the building of a canoe. Donald's sons would not have tired of watching the curious fashioning of this craft if it had taken thrice as long to peel off the long sheet of white birch-bark, to make the ash frame, to sew the seams with spruce roots, and make them watertight with grease and turpentine, and then to drive in the lining of cedar splints. A few days sufficed to finish it, and Joe Wadso was only waiting to be sure that Petowbowk was as clear of ice as

Wonakaketuk to begin his long, lonely journey to Canada.

One day he paddled down the river to its mouth, and finding the lake a shining, sparkling expanse of open water as far northward as he could see, returned and made ready for final departure. He could not barter all his furs for the bright cloth, beads, and trinkets Donald offered him ; there were things more wanted in the little wigwam of St. Francis ; but he did exchange a goodly portion of them for an indispensable gun and axe, and he gave the handsomest otter skin of them all to Gudewife McIntosh.

“Goo’-by, Makintoose,” he said, shaking hands with the man who had saved his life. “You good ; me no forgit um.”

“Gude-by, Watson,” said Donald, — the Scotchman’s tongue could get no nearer his name than this, — “gude-by, Watson. It’s a lang road ye hae before ye, but I trust it’ll be a smoother ain nor that ye cam’ by.”

Wadso stepped into his canoe and paddled away. The thunder of Ne-tah-me-pun-tuk roared behind him along many a winding reach of the noble river ; then, when the waves of Petowbowk danced before him, fell to a murmur like the voice of the wind in pine trees, till at last as he turned his prow northward, toward the meeting of lake and sky, its voice was heard no more.

Summer had come and gone, and so had Colonel Reid's force of workmen ; but they had left more noticeable traces of their presence than the season had. One summer's growth was not perceptible in trees that were old when white men first had seen them, and Netahmepuntuk spoke to the wilderness in the same thunderous voice it had uttered for uncounted years. Nature's slow changes in the short space of months were unmarked, but the hand of her puny offspring had made its sign of conquest, destroying with a few axe-strokes trees that had cost her the sunshine and rain and fattened soil of a century to rear ; building with the tools he had wrested from her, engines that were to help him in his labor of destruction. The little sawmill looked pert, intrusive, and insignificant, overtopped as it was by the forest, and in its out-of-place newness like some strange waif of the floods stranded on the rocky verge of the fall. It was finished, covered with boards of its own sawing, and had already begun to gnaw at the heart of the woods. There was little call for boards yet, but there would be, — settlers were coming in, and the sawmill bided its time. The grist-mill was begun and next year would be ready for work, — a little prematurely, for the virgin soil was yet unstirred, the grain it was to grind not yet sown. But grists would come and the mill would be ready for them.

The leaves had fallen again and the approach of

winter was each day becoming more evident. The November blasts, clashing the naked branches and scattering the dead leaves in wild flurries; the clouds of mists they swept from the shattered waters of the cataract; the cawing of departing crows; the clangor of wild geese hurrying southward in great flights, all told of its coming. Indeed, its royal seal was already set on lofty Tah-wah-be-de-e Wad-so, whose peak now shone against the steel blue sky at midday dazzling white; at evening, rose-tinted in the last sunset rays.

The shadows of night were falling around Donald McIntosh's blockhouse almost as thick in the little clearing as in the illimitable forest, for all the few stars that coldly glittered above it and the reflected light of its square patch of sky. Not a glimmer of lamp or firelight came through barred door and shutters. To one who approached it, the place would have seemed deserted by humankind, and its loneliness was made more lonely than by perfect silence by the solemn, ceaseless roar of the falls and by the long howl of a wolf — a wail as melancholy, as hopeless as the voice of some lost spirit, doomed to eternal, lonely wanderings.

Doubly cheerful, by contrast with the gloom and loneliness of its outward surroundings, was the cheerful interior of Donald's house. The great wood-fire, blazing in the wide fireplace, filled the room with light and warmth, and the flaring flames

that licked the huge back-log set grotesque shadows dancing on the rough walls, now leaping to the beams and boards of the ceiling, now sinking to the puncheon floor, — shadows of the Highlander and his family, who were sitting around the hearth variously employed.

Donald sat with folded arms smoking his cutty and thinking of other lands and scenes, when his abstracted gaze was lifted from the lurid pictures of the fire to the long gun that hung above the mantel, honored more than the three Tower muskets that also hung there, for it was the gun he had carried in Culloden fight; and by it hung his skene dhu, or Highland dirk. Gudewife Bessie was knitting, while she had an eye to the venison stewing in the pot hanging high on the trammel and to two great johnny-cakes baking on their boards atilt before the fire — one trick of Yankee cookery that the gudeman favored. John, the eldest son, was weaving the raw-hide filling of a snowshoe after the Indian fashion he had learned of Wadso. Alexander, or Sandy, was whittling the ashen bow of one of another pair of this indispensable winter foot-gear. Donald, the youngest, a tall lad for his fourteen years, was reading by the firelight one of the few books they possessed. He was a studious boy, much given to wandering alone in the woods and finding out the medicinal virtues of roots and herbs, learning them of the Indians who frequently

came there to trade, and also by experiment on himself. Following this bent, he later became a doctor, and many an old volume may now be found bearing the signature of "Dr. Donald McIntosh." Each was so busy with his thoughts or occupation that a long silence had fallen on the group, which Donald the younger was the first to break.

"Something I hae read here minds me, I dinna ken how, o' a tale the Indian, Wadso, tauld me o' the linn; a gruesome auld-time tale o' his folk, how the Great Spirit saved them when they were near swept off the face o' the airth."

"Gie it till us, lad," said Donald, knocking the ashes from his cutty and refilling it from his pouch. "It'll sarve to while away the time whiles the bannocks are bakin'. The reek o' your pot makes the time seem ower lang, Bessie."

Bessie set the boards more upright against the flatirons that held them, and young Donald began his story, which ran this wise:—

"Hundreds and hundreds of years ago, Wadso's people, the Zooquagese, had been reduced to a mere handful, and this poor remnant of their once powerful tribe was now in imminent danger of complete extinction. For many days the few canoe-loads of starving people had been fleeing before a strong war party of their ancient enemies, the Iroquois. Too weak to make even a show of resistance, their only hope was in flight or hiding, and

it seemed as if these might not avail to save them now. From Quineaska¹ to Wonakaketuk,² dodging from point to point, from bay to hidden cove, they had been followed by their relentless pursuers, only escaping capture because their birch-bark canoes were fleetier than the clumsier elm-bark ones of their enemies. But the arms of starving men were weak, and their foes were close upon them, when, as a last resort, they sped up the winding reaches of Wonakaketuk, seeking refuge in the heart of the wilderness. As the last canoe of the Zooquagese was disappearing around a wooded bend, a spent arrow from the foremost Iroquois canoe came curving down from its flight and splashed in the water beside it. The pursuers, now certain of the prey that so long had baffled and eluded them, rent the stillness of the forest with a yell so devilish that the Zooquagese women covered their heads with their robes, and hugging their starving babies to their breasts sat silently awaiting death. Their medicine-man, so old that his head was white as the snow on Tahwahbede-e Wadso, had performed every incantation that he hoped might bring deliverance, and yet continued to pray fervently.

“‘Great Master of Life!’ he cried, in a shrill voice, tremulous with age but not with fear, ‘behold how near thy people are to death. Once they

¹ Shelburne Point.

² “The Crooked River,” or Otter Creek.

were many; now they are few. Yet spare them, O Master! Let not their lives be as the track of a wind-blown leaf upon the snow. Spare them, that the White Land may again be peopled with the Zooquagese. What have they done to make thee angry? When their corn was planted, came frost and drouth to kill it. The arrows of the hunters were blunted; they could kill no game. They starved, eating roots like bears, eating bark like the Adirondacks. Their strong men grew weak; their women cried continually with hunger, and many died — men, women, and children. See how few are left. Now come the Iroquois wolves to devour them. What shall they do to appease thy anger? Take thou one and spare the rest. Many days have I seen. For a hundred years have my eyes beheld the greenness of the forest; the snows of winter come and go. They have beheld the wigwams of the Zooquagese on every stream of the White Land; their warriors so many that they held the gate of the country against the Iroquois wolves. They shall not see the last of my people devoured by them. Take thou me, O Master of Life, and spare them!’

“Grasping in each withered hand a heavy stone axe, he arose, and with a light upon his face as if even now there shone upon it the eternal summer of the Happy Hunting Grounds, he sprang from the canoe and sank like a plummet beneath the

waters. So sure of their prey that they would not waste an arrow on this pitiful remnant of the Zooquagese, the Iroquois were sweeping upon them in a double line of canoes stretching from shore to shore. As the Zooquagese looked back, they saw, where the circling ripples briefly marked the place of their venerated priest's disappearance, the wide river suddenly broke in twain, — that part beyond, with banks and forest, sinking down, down, far below them, while the mighty volume of the river, rushing over the precipice to the lower level, engulfed every Iroquois in death so instantaneous that their dying yell was heard but for one moment rising with the new-born thunder of Netahmepuntuk."

"An' did Watson tell ye that fule's tale, lad?" Donald said, when his son had ended his story. "Aweel, it's my belief the Linn o' Otter was created lang before Zooquagese, or ony ither geese, were in the warld. Accordin' to Scripture the warld was finished" —

Here he was interrupted by a light knock at the door, a sound so unusual that all were startled by it.

"Wha's there?" Donald demanded, taking down his skene dhu and going to the door.

"Me!" a low voice answered.

"There's mony a 'me' i' the warld that I wadna let in," said Donald. "Gie us your name, mon."

"Me," the voice repeated in as low a tone. "Don't know um, Joe Wadso, Makintoose?"

"By the pikers o' war!" cried Donald, beginning to unbar the door. "If it isna the very un we were speakin' o'! Speak o' the deil an' he'll be at your lug! Come in, mon. But haud a bit; are ye alane?" peering cautiously out into the darkness through the chink of the scarcely opened door. The narrow bar of light fell on but one figure, and this Donald admitted, quickly closing and fastening the door again.

"Set your gun i' the corner, Watson, and come to the ingleside. There's a stepmither's breath i' the air the night. An' ye keep the old fusee yet?" he said in amused wonder, as his eye caught the familiar brass mountings of the gun he had sold the Indian. "Lord! but I thought she'd 'a' kickit hersel' out o' your reach ere this. A wicked piece, she is, wi' na choice o' which end she kills maist at."

"Yas," the Indian said, with partial understanding of Donald's discourse, "he good gun; me feel um when he shoot. Kill um plenty."

They were all glad to see him. The coming of any peaceably disposed visitor was a pleasant break in their isolated life; but Wadso was a friend,—one whom having succored, they could no more help having a kindly regard for than he for them.

He told them in his broken English of his long, lonely journey home; recounting all its small adventures with the minuteness that hunters and

woods-haunters love to hear and tell; how he had thrown his last handful of tobacco to dread Wajahose,¹ the Forbidder, and so made safe his journey thence to the end of the lake; and how his family had rejoiced over his coming as of one returned from the dead. He gave John his approval of the weaving of the easier ends of the snowshoe, and helped him out with the more intricate and puzzling middle part; gave the finishing touches with his crooked knife to Sandy's frames, and answered young Donald's questions concerning certain wild plants.

The johnny-cakes and venison stew were served, and when the meal was ended, Donald and his guest sat before the cheerful hearth and chatted as they smoked their pipes, till, when they had exhausted many topics, there came a lull in their talk. After casting a furtive glance around the group, the Indian, turning suddenly to his host and laying his hand upon his knee, broke the silence.

“Makintoose, you know um what for me come?”

“Aweel, Watson, to mak' a friendly visit, nae doubt, an' happen to sell me some furs. But mind ye, Watson, I canna gie ye sae mickle for furs ye hae ta'en this airly in the season. It's a puir fashion ye Indian bodies hae o' catchin' the beasties before they hae put on their winter claes, an' the killin' o' half-grown musquash kits, their skins not

¹ Rock Dundee.

worth takin' off, is shamefu' waste o' God's gifts, an' I'se warrant ye hae a score o' the like in your pack!"

"Yas," the Indian assented, "some Injun bad. Dat what me come for tell um you. So many," holding up both hands with the fingers extended. "Not catch um much; come here soon; takum 'way you cloth, you bead, you gun, axe, all! No give um you not'ing for um! Maybe kill! No let um all come in one time. Jus' one. Me hear um talk plan. Me come tell um you, long, long way up Sungahne tuk. Dey know, dey killum me. You no tell um?"

"Tell o' ye, mon!" cried Donald, in a towering rage at the disclosure. "Nae, nae; but by the pikers o' war, I'll blaw the murtherin' sauls out o' their bodies. The murtherin' thieves, to plot such deevilment on me wha hae always been their friend an' dealt fair wi' them. I'll blaw the heads off their bodies gin they come wi'in musket range o' the house."

"No, Makintoose, no kill um; no best way. All Injun in St. Francis come fight um you den. No, no; no kill um. No let um come in house. By um by go 'way."

"Aweel, nae doubt 't wad be imprudent," Donald admitted, after some consideration, "but it wad be maist comfortin' till my saul to kill every deil's son o' them. Ten o' them, ye say? An' when may I be expectin' the pleasure o' their company?"

“Makintoose speakum too big word; me no un’stan’.”

“When will they come?” McIntosh repeated his question in simpler phrase.

“Mebbe to-morrow. Goin’ leave canoe Wonakaketukese¹ mebbe nex’ day. Come daytime. Make b’lieve come sell fur; big pack; leaf in it. All come in, git hold gun. Makintoose no can shoot. Den take all. Go Canada.”

“Damn them! If they tak’ awa’ their hides whole they may be thankfu’,” cried Donald.

“Well,” said Wadso, rising, “me go now.”

“Go!” cried Donald in astonishment. “Go? Deil a step’ll ye go out o’ this till the morrow! You’re daft, mon!”

“Yas,” said the Indian, “mus’ go. Goin’ snow fore mornin’. Track tell um story me been here. Dat no good for me.”

“Weel, if ye must ye must, but it’s no to my mind to hae a friend gang fra’ my door at this hour; an’ I dinna think it can snaw the night. A’ the stars were shinin’ when I let ye in.”

“Yas, snow sartin,” said the Indian, - when Donald had opened the door, as he pointed to the stars now dimly shining through a thickening haze. “Goo’-by, Makintoose. You no help me, no Joe Wadso, now. Me tell um you me no forget. You b’lieve um?”

¹ Little Otter Creek.

“Ye’re a gude mon, Watson, ye hae paid mair nor ye owed,” said Donald warmly, as he shook hands with his departing guest. “Fare ye weel, an’ gude luck attend ye.”

When the form of the Indian had, noiseless as a shadow, vanished in the gloom, Donald barred the door with more than usual care and inspected the fastenings of the window and loopholes.

“The deevils canna storm the place. It’ll be by strategy they’ll tak’ it if at a’. An’ now, lads, we’ll see if the guns are a’ in order an’ run a few mair balls, an’ then bide what the morrow will bring.”

The blood of Donald’s sons had lost nothing of the Highland warmth by their American birth, and they entered with alacrity upon the preparation for a fight which they hoped might come. When the guns were cleaned and loaded, a good supply of bullets cast and trimmed, and powder horns filled, bedtime came at a much later hour than usual to the family, though they were to rise at the earliest daylight and bring in wood and water enough to last, if need be, through a two days’ siege.

The day dawned late and dim, for the Indian’s forecasting of the weather had been true, and the dull, gray sky was sifting down a snowfall that was fast turning the dark woods to a lighter gray than bare trunks and naked branches had worn. The silence of the forest was never deeper than now.

The muffled roar of the falls only emphasized it, nor was it broken by any sound nor its wintry deadness stirred by any signs of life but the axe strokes and swiftly moving figures of Donald and his sons as they cut and gathered their fuel.

“Now,” said Donald, when they had finished, “deil a step we’ll stir abroad till yon thieves hae come an’ gane, an’ the quicker they come the better, if they’re to come at a’. Watson was right, but wha but an Indian wad hae thought o’ snaw fallin’ sae soon? An’ the stars blinkin’ sae bright. They’re as wise as the musquash consairnin’ auld Dame Nature’s whimwhams o’ weather. They’re closer friends o’ her nor we, an’ she tells them o’ mony a plan o’ hers lang before we guess o’ ’t.”

It was tedious waiting the coming of their evil-minded visitors, as each in turn kept watch at the narrow embrasure through which came the only daylight that entered the room — a dull, gray bar that now feebly pierced the shadows, now was touched, now overcome by the yellow firelight. Till the sunless, unmarked noontide, the watchers saw only the stump-dotted clearing, fading away to the indistinct wall of the forest, a blur behind the veil of falling snow. Then to his strained vision it seemed as if a tall stump had become endowed with life and was drawing nearer, followed by another and another till ten figures, advancing in single file, were revealed.

"Here they come!" said John, who was watching at the loophole. "Ten o' them, now in line sae that I could put ane ball through the half o' them. What for no?"

"Nae, nae, lad," said his father peremptorily, "I hae a better plan, an' if it warks weel, the thievin' loons will learn a lesson they winna forget, an' 't will serve us better nor if bluid were shed; though I confess I hae nae qualms o' conscience against it, in this case."

While Donald spoke, the leading Indian had come boldly to the door and knocked.

"What wad ye be wantin'?" the Highlander demanded through the loophole.

"Wantum come in," the Indian replied, "snow um hard."

"Aweel," said Donald, "a wee bit powtherin' o' snaw winna harm ye. I dinna ken wha ye are. For aught I ken ye may be the Yankee Allen an' his riev'in' gang, maskin' in the dress o' honest Indians."

"Ha! ha!" the Indian laughed. "No Pastoniac.¹ Makintoose not know me, Woksas? Sell um you plenty fur many time. Got um plenty fur now. See!" holding up his plethoric pack, and pointing to those of his companions. "Come, open klogan."

"I hae nae objection till honest trade," said Donald, after some apparent deliberation, "an' I

¹ Yankee.

will let ye in, ane at a time; but ane at a time, mind!"

"How long Makintoose be squaw, an' git um 'fraid friend?" the Indian insolently demanded.

"Ye half painted, neither black nor white son o' the deil! I'm weel minded to blaw ye to hell, where ye belang!" cried Donald in a blaze of anger at this imputation of cowardice, drawing back to put his musket through the loophole. Recovering himself, he said in a calm voice, "Come in, ane at a time, or gang awa' the gait ye cam'."

The Indian understood his anger but not the words in which it was expressed, and withdrawing a little consulted briefly with his companions.

"Well, Makintoose, we no 'fraid of friend; we come in, then nudder an' nudder. Open klogan;" and he came alone to the door. It was opened just wide enough to admit him, then closed and barred so quickly behind him that his comrades found their premeditated rush stopped before they reached the threshold. The look of mingled surprise and sullen defiance which the face of Wokses wore when he found himself cut off from his companions and confronted by the muzzles of the three muskets in the hands of Donald's sons, was an expression worth studying, but the little garrison troubled themselves not with that.

"Set your gun i' the corner an' listen to me," Donald said sternly.

The Indian sullenly obeyed, and with folded arms confronted the Scot.

"I hae a beuk," Donald said impressively, as he opened the blackest and mustiest volume in his possession, "that tells me a' things. The leaves that talk hae tauld me where ye hae been ; on Sungah-netuk, and what ye hae planned. Ye hae come to rob me that hae aye been your friend. It tells me that the furs in your pack are not worth a baubee. Your pack is filled wi' leaves. Open it."

The expression of astonishment on the face of the Indian, in spite of all his efforts to control it, grew to one of terror without changing in sullenness ; but he did not move.

"Open it !" Donald repeated, pointing to the pack, and John raised his piece till Wokses saw a little way down its black muzzle.

Then he stooped and slowly unbound the thongs of his pack while he cast upward furtive glances, and at last exposed packages of leaves bound in sheets of birch-bark.

"Now, gang doun there," Donald commanded, pointing to the cellar hatchway, now yawning a little black square in the puncheon floor. The Indian hesitated, but the three guns steadily pointing at him were potent persuaders, and he went down the steps into the darkness.

"If ye show your head till I tell ye, I'll blaw it off your body," Donald said, and turned to the

loophole while one of his sons stood guard at the hatch.

“Now, let another come!”

Hesitatingly another Indian came forward, was let in, cut off from the others, and by the same means as thoroughly impressed with the foreknowledge of the wise Makintoose as their leader had been. He, too, was ordered into the cellar and another was told to come in. More reluctantly than the others, he did so, and was treated just as they had been; told the purpose of their visit, the contents of his pack, obliged to prove it by opening it, and then to go into the cellar. The mysterious disappearance of their friends, who had entered and thereafter made no sign, struck those who yet were outside with suspicion of something dreadful awaiting them; and when the next was told to come in he refused, and all withdrew, at first slowly, then with swifter pace, till presently, panic seized them and they fled to the woods, each striving to gain first the shelter of the trees. When Donald was assured of their retreat, he closed the loophole and turned to the cellar hatch.

“Come up, now, Wokses!” he called. “Come up, the hail o’ ye.”

Shamefaced and sullen, the three climbed the steps and ranged themselves, covered by the guns of the Highlander’s sons. “Now, Wokses,” said Donald in a stern voice, “ye see that I kenned a’

your wicked plans. An' by the same token," tapping his book, "I shall ken a' ye plan against me hereafter. But for that, I wad kill ye like wolves, as ye weel disarve. But ye canna harm me, ye puir fules o' murtherin' thieves. Ye canna tak a step fra this till Canada but I will ken it by this beuk. Tak your firelocks and yon packs o' rubbish leaves an' gang back till Wonakaketukese, where ye left your canoes. Go, as hail as ye cam, but never let me set eyes on ye mair, or by the pikers o' war! I'll blaw the black hearts out o' ye."

So saying he closed the door on them, and they departed in sullen silence, never looking back till their fading forms were absorbed in the gray of the woods.

"Aweel," said Donald, with a sigh of relief as he closed the loophole, "we're rid o' them an' naebody hurt, though possibly a' were a wee bit scared. But o' that inward hurt, I doubt the Indians hae the warst. An' now, Bessie, lass, get some Yankee bannocks bakin', for this strategy o' war is hungry wark."

A SON OF THE REVOLUTION

A MORNING train passed out of the thronging city among the freshly budding trees and green fields, on and on, northward till it reached dun meadows and pastures and bare woods, just purpling with swollen buds, that were but yesterday deserted by the sugar makers. When the last busy town had been left behind, there was a stretch of level country that tired one of the passengers with its dreary sameness, and he became more interested in the people who entered the train at the wayside stations.

There were farmers, ill at ease in holiday attire; shrewd speculators whose conversation was of potatoes and hay; a clerk of a country store, proud of the recognition of a couple of commercial travelers; a meek-faced clergyman, traveling on half-fare and looking as if his living were the same; a jaded woman with a crying baby; another, serene in the midst of her restless and numerous brood; some giggling school girls and the inevitable newly married couple, impressed with the idea that the present event of their lives was as momentous to all the world as to them. Of them all, his kindest interest was drawn to an old woman who came in burdened with a satchel, a bundle and a double-

lidded wicker basket, for which he helped her to find places. A cloud of anxiety was partially lifted from her kindly face when she was settled in her seat with the basket in her lap. She raised one lid and, after a careful inspection of the contents, selected a couple of cakes, one of which she offered her new acquaintance while she attacked the other with the scattered skirmish line of her few remaining teeth.

"I guess I was journey praoud this mornin' an' this noon tew," she apologized, "for I could n't seem tu eat no breakfus' nor no dinner sca'cely, an' begin tu feel the want on 'em. You 'd better hev you a cookey ; they 're proper good an' got caraways in 'em. My son's wife made 'em on puppus fer my luncheon, but there 's sights more 'n I can eat, an' you 're more 'n welcome."

"Thank you. I 'm sure they 're nice, but I 've just eaten my lunch."

"Wal, I c'n save 'em fer Sally's child'n." She replaced the cake in her basket and delved deeper among its treasures. "They 'll consait 'at anythin' gran'ma fetches 'em 's better 'n what they have t' hum, for all their mother 's jest as good a cook as Jonas' wife is, ef I that larnt her du say it. Sally 's my darter, an' lives up tu Manchester, an' I 'm a-goin' up there tu see her if I ever live tu git there. Haow these 'ere railroads does go!" Her wrinkled, russet face began again to be clouded

with the anxieties of unaccustomed travel. "You don't s'pose they'll fergit tu stop tu Manchester, du ye?"

"Oh, no," he assured her, "and we'll hear the name called."

"An' I s'pose this 'ere ticket's all right?" she asked, submitting it to his inspection after a flurried search in every possible place of deposit. Having her fears quieted on this point, she resumed the exploration of the basket and presently brought out of it a big greening, turned to the color of old gold with perfect ripeness.

"Naow, you must take an apple. Anyb'dy can eat an apple any time, an' this 'ere's a rael Rhode Islan', greenion. Gran'ther he fetched the graf's f'm Rhode Islan', hossback, an' sot 'em in the orchid on aour ol' place tu Bennin't'n, where I was borned an' brought up, an' my son Jonas, he got the graf's off them very same trees which they're a-livin' an' a-bearin' yet."

"You were born in Bennington? Was your father or grandfather in the battle?" asked the young man.

"Land o' massy, yes," she answered, with a flush of honest pride. "There was gran'ther an' three o' my great uncles fit tu Bennin't'n fight, an' one 'em was killed an' another was waounded. Massy sakes, I've heered gran'ther, his name was Joseph, same as his father's, Joseph Fay; I've heered him

tell it all over, time an' ag'in, when I was a leetle mite of a gal."

"My great-grandfather was in that battle, too," said the young man, with increasing interest. "Shoulder to shoulder with your people, like enough. Did you ever hear your grandfather speak of a comrade named Belden — Michael Belden?"

"Belden, Belden — wal, no, I don't seem to remember hearin' tell o' the name. An' so your great-gran'ther was tu Bennin't'n fight. Wal, I say for 't, we're sort o' related, you an' I be, hain't we?" and the kindly face beamed a grandmotherly smile upon him that warmed the young man's heart.

"Waill-loom-loomsack." A brakeman echoed his unintelligible call amid the outer clash and roar that rushed in at the briefly opened door.

"Was't Manchester he hollered?" the old woman inquired, as she nervously snatched her various articles of baggage.

"No; it is Walloomsack," said he, reading the name of the station as the train slowed up.

"Oh, yis, yis, I know, an' aour folks fit right here. Yis, right on that 'ere little hill over yender was where aour folks woostered the Hessians."

She pointed her crooked and knotted finger, tremulous with excitement, to a low, partially wooded hill, and at sight of the historic field he too was thrilled with patriotic emotion. The re-

mainder of her journey seemed short to him as he listened to her anecdotes gathered from her grandfather, of Revolutionary days, and when he helped her from the train he parted from her as from an old friend who was drawn to him by a closer tie than ordinary friendship, that of ancestral blood offered in the same heroic cause.

Harry Belden had perfect health, good looks, an ample fortune, a host of friends, and had gained the heart of Katrina Van Tromp, who was as lovely as she was high bred and aristocratic. His own ancestry was obscure, for it had been his father's pride during a busy life to be the founder of a wealthy and influential family rather than the inheritor of a name made famous by some dead ancestor, and Harry barely knew the Christian name of the honest husbandman who was his great-grandfather. It was known that old Michael Belden fought at the battle of Bennington, but there were neither family papers nor known public record to substantiate the fact. On the death of his grandparents, their homestead with all its belongings had been sold, yet Harry Belden was now on his way thither, in the hope of finding some proof of his ancestor's services which would entitle him to membership in the patriotic societies, to which so many of his friends belonged. When at nightfall he left the train at a little wayside station and saw the miry

road flanked by drifts of grimy snow, he knew he had outrun the advance of spring. Wading through ankle-deep mud to the little hotel, he procured decent supper and lodgings.

The next morning he found the well-known title of the "Belden Place" had become so nearly obsolete that he felt disgust for the people that could so soon forget the name of even the humblest defender of its country ; but having gained directions, he set forth in quest of Peter Carter, the present owner. There was exhilaration in the clear bracing air with a smack of spring mingled in its cold drafts and in the crisp response of the frozen sleigh path to his footfalls that presently brought him to the little gray and brown house.

He at once recognized the humble homestead of three generations of his family, for his father had often described it. There it slept in forgetfulness of its first owner, in the long shadow of the great Lombardy poplar he had set as a landmark among the fertile acres his hands had cleared of their native primeval growth. Close before it lay Lake Champlain, waveless and silent beneath its white covering of ice. Here, he thought, with a touch of tender emotion, the old soldier, tired of war's alarms, came to spend his declining years among these peaceful scenes of the land whose enemies he had helped to conquer. Harry felt it would be pleasant to have the home of the old hero again

belong to his family and he was formulating an idea of repurchasing it as he entered the gate. A swarthy little man who was chopping wood in the yard ceased his labors and leaned upon his axe to regard Harry long before he was within speaking distance, and so continued, till he was bidden good-morning and asked if Mr. Carter lived there.

"Mawny," he answered, as he sharply eyed the stranger. "Yas, he leeve here. But prob'ly you can't sol' it somet'ings, Ah guess. What kan o' t'ings was you peddled in so leetle bag?"

"No, I am not a peddler."

"Den prob'ly you was some rellashin, ant it?"

"I am no relative."

"Wal," said the Canadian, scratching his puzzled head, "you ant peddled, you ant rellashin, you ant look lak ministy. Ah don' know me, what you want of it, Onc' Peter."

"I want to talk with the old gentleman if he is at home."

"Wal, if you goin' talk to it, you got for holler, Ah tol' you. He ant gat very good hear. Yas, Onc' Peter in de haouse," and then, as if satisfied that one who came with no purpose but to talk with an old Yankee was worthy no further notice, the Canadian began plying his axe with an explosive exhalation at every stroke.

Harry rapped at the low door. It was opened

by an old woman, whose wrinkled face was like an apple that baking has not robbed of all its ruddiness. After eyeing him closely for some clue to recognition, she ushered him into a tidy kitchen wherein lingered a homely savor of innumerable batches of cookery. Fortified against the hurry of present days in its tower of curled maple, an old clock measured time with decorous solemnity — a fine old relic that might well have been owned by the Revolutionary hero. Above the unused fireplace and the mantel shelf's array of medicine bottles, candlesticks, and phenomenal growths of fields and woods, hung an old flintlock, rusty with time and dusty with disuse. It looked old enough to have been his great-grandsire's weapon, and Harry made a mental note of the possibilities. A bent old man sat behind the stove, leaning on a staff. He nodded while he directed a vacant stare upon the visitor as the old woman handed him a flag-bottomed chair.

"Mr. and Mrs. Carter?" he asked.

"Them's aour names when we're tu hum. What might yourn be?" said she.

"I am the son of Mr. Belden, who sold you this place."

"I wanter know!" and repeating the information to the old man, she drew a chair before her visitor, seated herself and bestowed upon him a still closer scrutiny.

"I knowed your father when he wa' n't knee high tu a grasshopper," said Peter, with awakened interest, "an' I knowed his father afore him, an' his father, ol' Uncle Michael Belt'n. They say Henry Belt'n's richer'n mud. His father wa' n't, nor yet his'n, not no richer'n we be. It doos beat all! An' haow's your father stood the winter — tol'able well?"

"Very well," said Harry, "and wished to be remembered to you. You spoke of my great-grandfather. I've come all the way from New York to find out what I could about him. Did you ever hear him speak of the battle of Bennington?"

"Law, yis," quavered Peter. "I remember ol' Uncle Michael as well as if it wa' n't on 'y yist'd'y, a turrible clever goo'-natur'd ol' man, he was, 'at you'd never thought o' bein' a soger an' killin' folks."

Again young Belden's eyes returned to the ancient musket over the fireplace.

"Was that my great-grandfather's?" he asked, eagerly.

"That 'ere old fusee?" Peter asked, his dull rheumy stare slowly following Belden's index finger and getting an answer to his question from it. "Yes. Oh, yes, that was his'n."

"The one he carried at Bennington?"

"Yes, I s'pect mebb'y 't was," Peter answered, non-committally.

"If you are willing to part with it, for a consideration, I'd like to have it."

"Oh, I don't know," Peter deliberated. "I kinder need a gun, naow an' ag'in, for tu ketch a pick'ril when the ma'sh gits open, an' shoot crows a-pullin' corn an' scare away hen hawks. I do' know's I care 'baout sellin' on 't tu-day."

"Could n't you buy another that would answer your purpose just as well? I'm willing to pay you a good price."

"Wal, I do' know," Peter deliberated, trying to fix on a price not so much above the value as to frighten his customer away. "You see, I'm sorter useter the ol' fusee. Don't know's I c'd git another 'at 'd suit me as well fer the money. What was you cal'latin' 't you could 'ford tu pay?"

Harry went over and took the dusty, rusty, dirty old piece from its hooks, thinking, as he felt its various accumulations on his hands, that it might properly be called a fowling-piece.

"Just for shooting purposes, I should say fifteen dollars would be all it is worth."

Peter had not dreamed of asking more than ten and the magnificence of the offer took his breath away, yet when he recovered speech he boldly attempted to raise the price.

"Seèm's if I'd ortu hev a leetle more. I do' know as ever I heard a gun roar ekel tu that ol' fusee. I do' know but she's loaded, an' if she is, you'd orter

'low me four-five cents more." But upon examination it was found to be empty of a charge. "Wal, s'posin' you call it sixteen."

When the money was counted out without demur, the old man was sorry he had not asked twenty.

"What did great-grandfather say about the battle? Did he ever talk it over in your hearing?"

"Law, yis, a hundred times, fur 's I know," the garrulous old man went on in a high-pitched, quavering voice. "He wan't a mite bashful abaout talkin' on 't. Haow they hurried along through the mud to git there an' it rained solid water, an' haow the Yankees peppered the Hessians f'm behind trees an' fences, an' haow the Injins hollered an' run, an' haow aour folks licked 'em clean aout twicte an' took all 'at did n't run away. Law, yis."

The young man instinctively glanced down to the left side of his coat lapel and could already see a blue and gold badge shining there. The old man went on:

"Law, yis, he did n't seem a mite 'shamed on 't."

"I should think not. It is something for the humblest man that took part in it to be proud of, and for his great-grandson to be proud of, as I am."

"Praoud? I do' know as him an' his'n héd any gret to be praoud on."

"Not one of our men failed to do his duty, as I

ever heard. Do you know if he was under General Stark, or did he belong to Warner's Green Mountain Boys?"

"What ye sayin'?" Peter asked, slowly, with hollowed palm to his best ear and his toothless jaw dropping far from its fellow. When the question was repeated he fell into a fit of coughing and wheezy laughter, so violent that though he brandished his cane in the vain attempt, he could snatch no words out of it till his faithful helpmate hobbled across to him and pounded him vigorously on the back. At last he gasped between coughs:

"Lordy, boy, ough-ough-ough, I can't tell ye. Say, mother, where 's that ough-ough 'ere paper 'at you faoun' a-cleanin' aout the upstairs cubberd?"

"I kep' it," she answered. "It 's safe in the top draw' o' the chist."

"Wal, fetch it an' let him see it. He c'n hev it if he wants it. It 's a kinder cur'osity."

Harry thought that here might be the positive proof he desired, or at least a valuable relic of his ancestor. Susan disappeared in jerky rheumatic haste and soon returned with a scrap of coarse, time-tinted paper, which she handed to the young man. He slowly deciphered the faded yet bold and handsome writing inscribed on it. Then he closely examined the paper until fully convinced of its authenticity and official origin, then placed it carefully in an inner pocket.

The next morning, as the rushing train swept Harry Belden past the budding trees of the old battlefield, the sight aroused no thrill of pride, and he thought with mortification of the dear old woman, unassuming and modest about the glorious deeds of her ancestor and his noble brothers on that Walloomsack hillside. When back among green fields and the genial air of established spring and the hum of the city's bustle, he could but contrast the hopefulness wherewith he so lately went forth with the disappointment of his return. He speculated upon the effect the unforeseen results of his research might have upon the proud Katrina who traced her line of ancestry on one side back to a colonel in the Continental Army and on the other to a general commanding a fort on the Hudson. He harbored no thought of concealment, however, and believed her love would be stronger than her pride.

"And what did you learn of the old hero?" she asked that evening after the first greetings.

"I learned," said he slowly, handing her the scrap of paper, "that my great-grandfather was in the battle of Bennington. There is the proof."

Katrina unfolded the time-stained paper and with swift changing color flashing and fading on her face, read the words:

In Council of Safety, 27 Septem'r, 1777.

This is to Sartify that Michael Belten, a Hessian Soldier, deserter from Col. Baum's his Force,

is this Day parmitted to Pass beyond Otter Crik, to remain until further Orders of this Council. He behaving as Becometh.

JOSEPH FAY, Sec'y.

P. S. Was in Bennington Battle; has Taken the Oath of Fidellity to the United States.

"Well," said Katrina, slowly, after a long pause, "if he was in arms against us, he could not 'serve our country' better than by abandoning its enemies."

Harry Belden took the first opportunity to clean his newly acquired relic. Although it fell so far short of what he supposed it to be, he could but prize it as a possession of his great-grandfather and a substantial memento of a famous battle.

"It's a queer old weapon, anyhow," he said to himself, as he rubbed away the accumulations of grease and dust from the barrel and stock and clumsy barrel lock. "It's a relic of the battle anyway. There must be some marks if I can ever get down to them. Hello. Here are letters," and he read on the lock:

"Springfield, U. S., 1820."

AN OLD-TIME MARCH MEETING

ONE day in the latter part of February, Asahel Peck was observed to be abroad on horseback ; for, owing to a recent thaw, sleighing was bad, and wheeling worse. Those in the neighborhood of the town house saw him alight in front of that ancient and variously used structure and nail a paper to the battered and punctured door. It read as follows : —

MARCH MEETING

These are to notify and to warn all the Inhabitants of this Town who are legal Voters in Town Meeting to meet at the Town House on the first Tuesday in March the 3rd (proximo) at ten o'clock in the forenoon to transact business, viz.

1st to choose a moderator to Govern said meeting, 2nd a town clerk, 3rd, three or more persons to be Select men, Also Over Seeors of the poor, a Town Treasurer, Three or more Listers, a constable and Collector of Town rates or taxes, Grand and petit jurors, One or more Grand Jurymen for the town, Surveyors of the Highways, Fence viewers, pound keepers, Sealers of weights and measures, Sealers of Leather, also one or more tything men and hay wards. Also a committee to Settle with the Overseers of the Poor, also a Commit-

tee to settle with the Treasurer and report the state of the Treasury, a Superintending committee for schools, also to consider of the Propriety of adjoining Uriah Cruttenden's Farm to the School District known by the name of the New District and lastly to vote to defray the expenses of the Town the Current year.

ASAHEL PECK	} Select
JONATHAN YOUNG	
SEYMOUR HAYS	
	men.

Feb'y 18, 184-.¹

But few persons troubled themselves to read what could more easily be heard for only twelve days' waiting; and, moreover, every proposed measure of importance had been a subject for discussion at Hamner's tavern, the store, the blacksmith's shop, the shoemaker's, and the mill, as also at the town house itself, on several Sundays, before and after the services, held there alternately by the Methodists and Congregationalists: so that saints and sinners were already informed.

The days went by in sunshine and south wind. On the appointed day many voters came of choice on foot, across fields bare of snow but for drifts still enduring along the fences, while others jolted in wagons over the rutted main highways, superficially dried, rough-cast memorials of former difficult travel, one wind-swept mile of it now yielding dust enough for the ransom of a whole tribe of

¹ Copied from a Ferrisburgh Warning for Town Meeting.

Israel. Others came floundering and splashing along the crossroads, which were narrow lanes of mud between banks of snow sullied with the blown dust of ploughed land and muddy tracks of men and dogs. Overhead, straggling flocks of returning crows drove northward through their broad, clean, aerial thoroughfare. All terrestrial travelers tended, by different routes, toward the town house. Rows of horses lengthened along the neighboring fences. Freemen of all ages, from those newly assuming the responsibilities of voting and the burden of taxation to those beyond the demand of a poll tax, swarmed in at the door. There was a considerable attendance of boys, to whom the bustle inside was more novel and attractive than the feeble beginning of a game of ball outside.

The town house was an unpainted, weather-beaten, clapboarded building of one story, with one rough, plastered room, furnished with rows of pine seats, originally severely plain, but now profusely ornamented with carved initials, dates, and strange devices. A desk and seat on a platform at the farther end, for the accommodation of the town officers, and a huge box stove, so old and rusty that it seemed more like the direct product of a mine than of a furnace, completed the furniture of the room, wherein were now gathered a majority of the male inhabitants of the town. Its fathers, maintaining the dignity of office in stiff, high shirt

collars and bell-crowned hats, were grouped behind the desk, planning in semi-privacy the business of the day, while some self-appointed guardians of the public weal stood near, craning their necks and cocking their ears to catch scattered crumbs of the wise discourse. Old acquaintances from the farthest opposite corners of the township, who rarely met but on such occasions, exchanged greetings and neighborhood gossip. Hunters and trappers recounted their exploits to one another and an interested audience of boys. Invalids enjoyed their poor health to the utmost in the relation of its minutest details. Pairs of rough jokers were the centres of applauding groups, while other pairs exchanged experiences in the wintering of stock or discussed weather probabilities. From all arose a babble of voices, the silentest persons present being two or three of the town's poor, who had come to get the earliest intelligence of their disposal.

"Wal, I cal'late we're goin' tu' git an airly spring," said one of a knot of elderly men and middle-aged wiseacres. "When the ol' bear come aout he did n't see no shadder."

"What, the twenty-sixt' o' Febwary?" one of the latter chuckled. "Why, good land o' massy, the sun was er-shinin' jest as bright as 'tis to-day!"

"The twenty-sixt' hain't the day! It's the sec-ont, an' it snowed all day!"

"Sho! It's the twenty-sixt'," the other asserted. "Ev'ybody knows that 'at knows anythin' abaout signs."

"Wal, I know it's the secont."

"No, 't ain't nuther!"

"'T is tuther!"

"Wal," drawled big John Dart, "s'posin' the' wa'n't no bear ary day? What then?"

"What ye think o' this fur a sign?" a tall newcomer asked, pushing his way into the group, carefully holding in his hand a red and yellow cotton handkerchief, gathered at its corners, which he now unfolded, displaying three full-grown grasshoppers, not very active, but unmistakably alive. "There! I picked them up as I come across lots. What ye think o' that?"

There was a general expression of wonder, and Dart exclaimed, after a critical examination of the insects, "Good Lord, deliver us! Ef the grasshoppers is all ready tu transack business as soon's the snow's off 'n the graound, it won't make no odds tu us if we du hev an airly spring. They'll eat ev'ry identical thing as soon as it starts."

"Wal, I swanny, Billy Williams's dressed up consid'able scrumptious fer taown meetin'," the discoverer of the grasshoppers remarked irrelevantly, after a careful survey of the dignitaries grouped behind the desk. "S'pose he cal'lates he's goin' tu rep'sent the taown next fall?"

“Oh yes. It would n't be usin' on him well tu let him die a ye'rlin',” another responded.

“I do' know 's we're 'bleeged tu send him on that accaount,” the first speaker said. “We don't send folks tu Montpelier fur their health, but fur aour benefit. I never hear'd o' his duin' anythin' gret whilst he was up there.”

“I wonder 'f he ever delivered the speech up there 't he prepared,” a farmer asked, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, and inquiring faces were turned toward him.

“You never hear'd on 't? Wal, I tell ye 't was a buster. Tom Hamlin hear'd him a-practicin' of it one day when he went there on some errant tu Billy, an' the women folks sent him aout tu the barn tu find him; an' he hear'd him a-talkin' turrible airnest on the barn floor, an' so he peeked through a crack o' the door tu see who he was a-talkin' tu, an' there stood Billy wi' a paper in his hand, a-motionin' of it aout, an' nob'dy nor nuthin' afore him but an ol' poll ram a-stan'in' back in the further eend. ‘Mister Speaker,’ says Billy, ‘I rise tu make a motion,’ — then, as he turned araound tu git the light on his paper, the ol' ram let drive at him an' knocked him a-sprawlin' clean acrost the barn floor. Tom cal'lated Billy hed made his motion.”

“Ruther more of a turnaout 'n the' was tu the fust taown meetin' 'at I went tu in this taown,” Gran'-

ther Hill remarked to an old man who sat beside him, looking nearly his own age, but whose simple, almost childlike features were in marked contrast to the strong, grim visage of the veteran ranger.

"I s'pose likely," responded the other, glancing vaguely around. "I wa 'n't there."

"Ef you was, you hed n't no business there, fur you wa 'n't much more 'n borned," said Gran'ther Hill. "No, sir, the' hain't a livin' man here but me 'at was tu it."

"I s'pose there wa 'n't a turrible sight on ye?" his companion suggested.

"Not over twenty on us, all told; an' we hel' it in a log barn 'at stood t' other side o' the river, on Moses Benham's pitch, an' we sot raound on the log mangers, an' the clark writ on the head of a potash berril. We hed n't no sech fix-uppances as these 'ere," pounding the seat with his fist; "an' as fur that 'ere," punching the stove with his cane, "we jest stomped raound tu keep warm, an' did n't fool away much time no longer 'n we was 'bleeged tu."

"I s'pose you git your pension right along, reg'lar?" the younger old man asked.

"Sartainly; it comes as sure as death an' taxes," said Gran'ther Hill. "An' what in blazes is the reason you don't git yourn?"

"Wal, ye see," said the other, "they claim 'at they can't find the roll o' my comp'ny, daown there tu Wash'n'ton, — Comp'ny B, 'Leventh Regiment,

— but they say they can't find hide ner hair on 't; an' my discharge, that got burnt up 'long wi' all I hed, time o' the fire: so here I be, on the taown." The old man smiled in feeble resignation.

"It's a damned shame, an' you'd ortu hev your pension," Gran'ther Hill declared.

"Sarved him right fur bein' sech a plaguy fool," said a hard-featured man standing near, speaking not to the two old men, but for their hearing, as he explained to those about him: "He went 'n under his bed, when the haouse was afire, an' got a peck o' wa'nuts 't he'd fetched up f'm the Lake an' left his chist wi' all his papers in 't tu burn up. Yis, an' a bran'-new pair o' calfskin boots."

"I s'pose I kinder lost my head," the old soldier said apologetically, and still striving to smile in spite of a quivering of his chin; "an' the wa'nuts, I fetched 'em a-purpose fur my tew leetle gran'-childern; an' I do' know 's I'm sorry 'at I saved 'em, fur they died wi' canker rash, both on 'em, next spring, an' the loss on' em jest killed their mother, an' he married agin an' went off West, an' here I be. The' was one leetle chap 'at lived, but he was tew leetle tu remember me, an' they would n't never tell him nothin' 'baout his ol' gran'-ther, I s'pose," said the old man, with a sigh and a more pathetic smile.

"Lost his head!" the hard-faced man sneered. "An almighty loss that must ha' ben!"

Certain inarticulate sounds issued from Gran'ther Hill's toothless jaws, accompanied by a nervous handling of his staff, which indicated a rising storm that his companion at once strove to prevent, whispering anxiously into the veteran's ear, from which a tuft of grizzled hair bristled like an abatis:—

“Don't fur massy's sake say nothin' tu mad him, Cap'n Hill. He's a-goin' tu run fur poormarster, an' if he don't git it he's a-goin' tu bid for aour keepin'. If he gits a spite agin me, he'll gi' me gowdy. Don't say nothin'.”

Thus admonished, Gran'ther Hill corked the vials of his wrath, and contented himself with glowering savagely on its intended object and offering consolation to his friend.

“You need n't be 'shamed on 't, Ros'il. Misfortin hain't no disgrace tu a man 'at 's fit in the 'Leventh agin the British tu Chippewa an' that what-you-call-him's Lane. The disgrace is fur them 'at hain't no respect fur sech duin's. What ye s'pose I'd care 'f I was on the taown? By the Lord Harry, I'd tell 'em 't was an honor tu any taown tu hev a man on it 'at took Ticonderogue, an' was tu Hubbar't'n an' Bennin'ton! The country's goin' tu the divil, it's a-gittin' so corrup', an' we'll all be on the taown in a heap in less 'n twenty year, wi' the people's money bein' flung right an' left. I hear 'em a-talkin' o' hevin' ruffs over some o' the bridges. Lord Harry, what next?”

“Good airth an’ seas!” exclaimed the good-natured-looking shoemaker, who had just taken a seat near the veterans. “’Tain’t more ’n what we’re all lierble tu. ’T ain’t many year sen’ the constable useter warn ev’ry man jack of a newcomer tu clear aout lest he come on t’ the taown. There was ol’ Mister Van Brunt, ’at lived tu New York when he was tu hum, ’at owned more ’n tew thaousan’ acres here, come up an’ stayed quite a spell; an’ so the constable, he up an’ warned him aout o’ the taown. Van Brunt, says he tu him, ‘You go an’ ask the selec’men what they ’ll take fur this mis’able leetle insi’nificant taown, an’ I’ll buy the hul on ’t.’”

“I tell ye, it don’t signify, Ros’il Adams,” Gran’ther Hill began, when reminiscences and prophecies were cut short by the clerk’s calling the meeting to order.

Comparative quiet fell upon the assembly, that was for a few moments thriddled by the thin, whining voice of one of the invalids, who had not completed the details of his last bad spell. The clerk then read the warning that had been taken from the door, and announced the first business to be the choice of a moderator. Thereupon Squire Waite was nominated, and being unanimously elected, took his place beside the clerk behind the desk. He was a tall, portly old man, whose venerable presence was somewhat impaired by a curly chestnut wig.

With a voice deep and strong enough to have outborne the clamor of many ordinary ones, he addressed his assembled townsmen : —

“Gentlemen, the next business afore the meetin’ is to choose a town clark. Please nomernate some one so to sarve you.”

“I nomernate the exper’enced an’ deficient present incumberent, Joel Bartlett!” cried Solon Briggs, and the nomination was quickly seconded.

“Joel Bartlett is nomernated and seconted,” thundered the moderator. “You ’at ’s in favor of him a-sarvin’ of you as town clark, say ‘Aye.’”

There was a loud affirmative response, and when the squire called, “Contrary-minded, say ‘No,’” only Beri Burton answered, though he endeavored to make the noise of a majority.

“Gentlemen, the Ayes appear to hev it, and you hev made ch’ice of Joel Bartlett to sarve you as clark fur the ensuin’ year.”

The reëlected officer pursed his lips to their roundest and set himself to record the proceedings of the meeting ; his choice of implements being divided between a sputtering quill pen and a lead pencil so hard that its only mark upon the paper, unless frequently moistened, was a deep corrugation. The arrangement of his lips seemed especially adapted to the moistening process.

“The next business in order,” the moderator declared, after studying the warning, “is tu choose

three, four, or five selec'men. Haow many is it your pleasure tu hev?"

It was decided that there should be three, and two separate nominations and elections followed. According to the usual and wise custom, the first member of the old board was retired, the second elected to his place, the third to the second place, and a new man to the third place, for which there were three candidates, each with so considerable a following that a ballot was called for by three or more voters, and a spirited contest ensued. The readiest writers scribbled the names of their candidates on whatever scraps of paper came to hand, which were then cut into slips with jack-knives. These ballots were distributed to the eager voters who crowded around each writer, or were urged upon the wavering and indifferent. Each, when so provided, pushed into the swarming aisle and struggled forward, as if the fate of the nation depended on the immediate deposit of his ballot in the constable's bell-crowned hat, which was now devoted to this sacred service under the vigilant guardianship of its owner. Here, a tall, strong man forced a passage through the crowd, with some smaller, weaker men following easily in his wake. There, a small man, nearly overwhelmed, almost within reach of the voting place, held his ballot at arm's length above his head, like a craft, foundering within sight of port, flying a signal of distress. Having cast

their votes, some got out of the press as quickly as possible, while others clung about the voting place, curious to see the last ballot dropped into the hat and to watch the counting.

"Gentlemen, are your votes all in?" called the moderator.

No one responded during the five minutes of grace, and at their expiration the improvised ballot box was emptied on the desk. The counting began, by the clerk and the constable, while the hum of conversation again arose, continuing until the result of the ballot was announced. The rival candidates strove to hide their different emotions under the mask of unconcern, and their adherents soon forgot the brief contest in the strife for a board of listers and other important officers.

The old treasurer, who had through many years' service proved faithful to his charge, was continued as custodian of the town money, kept for the most part in a canvas shot bag conspicuously marked "B. B. Twenty-four lbs.;" and no one underbidding the old collector's offer to collect the tax for two per cent. thereof, he was unanimously reëlected to the dual office of constable and collector.

When it was voted that the selectmen should be overseers of the poor, Roswell Adams was greatly relieved of his anxiety, for he felt sure that at least two of the board were men who would have consideration for an unfortunate old soldier, and he

entered quite heartily into the humor of some of the minor elections.

Reuben Black, a blind man, was nominated for fence viewer, and came near being elected.

"You might ha' done wus 'n tu elec' me," said Reuben, "for I c'n smell aout a new fence an' feel aout a lawful one, an' du it in the darkest night jes' 's well as in daylight, an' thet 's more 'n most on 'em c'n du."

John Dart, whose gigantic frame was supported by a more than ample foundation, nominated the shoemaker for inspector of leather, an office without duties or emoluments, and he was unanimously elected.

"Ef I make an' mend your boots, John Dart, I cal'late I'll handle the heft o' the luther in Danvis!" he roared, in a voice that excited the envy of the moderator.

It was a common custom in Vermont, in the first half of this century, to permit all kinds of stock to run at large in the highways, which made it necessary to appoint several poundkeepers, and as many haywards, or hog-howards, as they were commonly called, whose duty was to keep road-ranging swine within the limits of the highways. Six poundkeepers were now elected, and their barnyards constituted pounds. There was a merry custom, of ancient usage, of electing the most recently married widower to the office of hayward, and it then

chanced that Parson Nehemiah Doty, the worthy pastor of the Congregationalists, had been but a fortnight married to his second wife. So an irreverent member of his own flock nominated him for hayward. The nomination was warmly seconded, and he was almost unanimously elected, even the deacons responding very faintly when the negative vote was called ; for the parson was a man of caustic humor, and each of its many victims realized that this was a rare opportunity for retaliation. Laughter and applause subsided to decorous silence when the venerable man arose to acknowledge the doubtful honor which had been conferred upon him ; and he spoke in the solemn and measured tones that marked the delivery of his sermons, but the clerical austerity of his face was lightened a little by a twinkle of his cold gray eyes : —

“Mr. Moderator and fellow townsmen, in the more than a score of years that I have labored among you, I have endeavored faithfully to perform, so far as in me lay, the duties of a shepherd : to keep within the fold the sheep which were committed to my care, to watch vigilantly that none strayed from it, and to be the humble means of leading some into its shelter. Thus while you were my sheep I have acted as your shepherd, but since you are no longer sheep I will endeavor to perform as faithfully the office of your hayward.”

“Wal, haow is 't?” John Dart inquired of the

nominator. "Hev ye got much the start o' the parson? Or hev ye?"

When every office of the town had been filled, a tax of eight per cent. on the grand list was voted, after violent opposition by a considerable minority of economists. Then a sharp-featured man, who had for some time awaited the opportunity, perched on the edge of his seat like some ungainly bird about to take flight, arose and spoke:—

"Mr. Moderator, it's my 'pinion, an' I guess 't is most ev'rybody's else's, 'at we ben a-payin' aout more money fur taown 'xpenses 'an we ortu, in p'rtic'lar fur keepin' aour porpers. You look a' one item,—fifty dollars fur keepin' the Bassett boy! Fifty dollars fur keepin' of a idjit,—as much as 't would ha' cost tu ha' wintered tew yoke o' oxen, pooty nigh! Why, it's ridic'lous!" He paused to give his audience time to consider the extravagant cost of supporting the Bassett boy, who had been a town charge for many years, yet by title, at least, seemed possessed of perennial youth, having been designated in the town reports for forty years as "the Bassett boy." "Course we wantur du what's right an' proper by aour porpers, but we don't wantur parmper 'em, an' we got tu be equinomercal. Naow what I was a-goin' tu say is 'at we hev sometimes heretobefore let aout the keepin' of aour poor to the lowest bidder, an' it hes been quite a savin' tu the taown; an' considerin' haow hefty aour ex-

penses hes ben durin' the past year, we might du wus, 'an tu try it agin."

As Squire Hard parted his coat tails and resumed his perch on the edge of the seat, another thrifty townsman arose to say, "I think the idee's a good one, an' if the gentleman'll put it in the shape of a motion, I'll secont it."

Thereupon the squire got up such a little way and for such a little while that he began at once to part his coat-tails while he said, "I move 'at the s'lec'men let aout the keepin'of the taown poor tu the lowest bidder," which was immediately seconded.

Yet before it could be put to vote a few made earnest protest against this barbarous but then not uncommon custom. The veteran of Ticonderoga got upon his feet with alacrity, and commanded attention with vigorous thumps of his staff as much as by his imperative voice, shaken and cracked by the heat of his indignation.

"Mr. Moderator, is the voters o' this 'ere taown white folks, or be they a pack o' damned heath-erns?"

"Order! Order!" the moderator thundered.

"I did n't say they was damned, but they will be if they don't quit sech cussedness. A-biddin' off the poor tu vandew is a cussed shame! I don't keer whether they be God's poor or the divil's poor, or poor divils. 'T'ould be humaner tu fat 'em up an' boocher 'em fur the' taller 'an what it 'ould be

to starve 'em the way they will be. Yes, by a damned sight!"

Again Squire Waite thundered, "Order! Order! We must hev order!" while Gran'ther Hill continued, "You need n't take no pride in what I say, Square Waite, but I swear I will hev vent, an' I do' know but I've hed all I kin 'thaout hittin' someb'dy," and he sat down, still snorting and growling.

His phlegmatic son declared, "It did n't somehaow sca'cely seem Christian duin's fur tu bid off humern white folks."

"The heft of aour poor aire in no ways tu blame fur bein' where they be, an' we'd better skimp some'eres else!" shouted the shoemaker.

"Gol dum th' poor tax!" mumbled Beri Burton. "Give 'em puddin' an' milk the year raoun', I say. Gol dum the poor tax!"

Before this many of the voters had dispersed, thinking all important business had been done, and others were impatient to get home by chore time, which was close at hand, as the waning afternoon admonished them: so that when the motion was put to vote, it was passed by a large majority. Then the first selectman announced that "bids for the support of our town's poor would now be received," while the old soldier of 1812 and his fellow paupers awaited the degree of misery to which they should be consigned.

One of the minority, whose plump, good-humored face gave proof that no living thing would suffer under his care, bid a little below the last year's cost. The anxious faces of the paupers brightened during the pause that succeeded this offer; but it only lasted while Peter Flint, the late reviler of the old soldier, after a brief mental computation, made a lower bid; and then another competitor entered the lists, and after a sharp contest of alternately decreasing bids, from which the rosy-faced farmer retired, the contract was awarded to Peter Flint.

"That means short rations fur us poor folks," said Roswell. "Why did n't a cannern ball knock my mis'able head off? I wish 't hed!"

"No, ye don't nuther, I tell ye," Gran'ther Hill declared, with emphatic thumps of his staff on the floor. "An' you hain't a-goin' tu starve nuther, if aour 'tater bin an' pork berril hol's aout. I'm a-goin' tu take ye hum along wi' me tu visit a year, an' the taown may go tu the divil fur all o' me. A-sellin' off men 'at fit fur the' country! By the Lord Harry, I would n't never fit fur it if I'd ha' knowed what a passel o' maggits it was a-goin' tu breed. I swear I won't agin, come what may!"

"You're turrible good, Cap'n Hill," faltered Roswell, overcome by this hospitable offer of a comfortable home, "but I don't b'lieve I'd ortu trouble ye, an' mebbly they — they won't let me."

"Shet yer head, an' go 'long an' git int' the

waggin. I sh'd like tu see 'em stop ye!" Gran'-ther Hill growled hoarsely, glowering fiercely on every one within range of his vision. "Jozeff, on-hitch the team, an' le 's be a-goin' hum."

"I p'sume like 'nough it 'll be all right wi' M'ri, his a-comin' in so sort o' onexpected," Joseph confided to Sam Lovel as he untied the halters; "but, Sam Hill, I guess by the time father's put him through Ticonderogue ev'ry day for three four weeks a-runnin', he 'll think he 'd ortu hev tew pensions. Gosh! it 'most seems sometimes 's 'ough I 'd ortu hev one, arter all I 've endured in them 'ere battles."

"Wal, if ary one on 'em gits sick on 't, you can send Ros'ell over tu aour haouse a spell," said Sam Lovel.

"An' when he gits Hill's folks an' you all eat aout, Lovel, we 'll give him a try down tu aour haouse," said John Dart, in a loud, confidential whisper that was like a gust of welcome south wind to the two old men already in the lumber wagon. "Skin Flint 'll haf ter wait awhile fur a chance tu starve Uncle Ros'ill an' git paid for it."

There was a stir of curiosity among the groups before the town house, and sentences were left unfinished, or finished unheard by the audience, as a stranger appeared there, a traveler, evidently, for he carried a carpet-bag, and the newness of his well-fitting clothes was worn off with far-journeying.

He searched the faces that were turned toward him, not as if in quest of a familiar one, but as if for one that promised the readiest answer to a question.

"Can you tell me, sir, if old Mr. Adams is here?" he asked a genial-looking farmer.

"That 's him 'at 's jest got inter Joe Hill's waggin," was the answer, and a half dozen ready forefingers indicated the vehicle.

Giving hasty thanks for the information, the stranger, a bright, alert-looking young fellow, hurried over, and asked with some embarrassment, dividing his inquiring glances between Gran'ther Hill and the shabby old man, "Is this Mr. Adams?"

"That 's my name," the latter answered, staring blankly at the questioner; and Gran'ther Hill, looking very grim, nodded in confirmation.

"Why, gran'pa, how d' ye do?" cried the young man, in a hearty voice. "You don't know me, do you?" he said, as the old man, still staring, responded in a maze of wonder, "Haow d' ye du, sir?"

"I 'm your gran'son, John White."

"Good Lord! you hain't!" the old man exclaimed, half incredulous; and then, studying the smiling face: "Oh, you be! I can see your ma's looks in your eyes jest as plain! Oh, my good Lord!" and he quite broke down.

The young man's eyes were moist, and he was

making futile efforts to swallow a lump in his throat. Gran'ther Hill cleared his own with a sound between a growl and a howl, cursing under his breath his "damned ol' dried-up gullet," and Joseph and Sam looked intently at nothing away off in the fields, while they groped blindly in their pockets for handkerchiefs.

"I do' know, but it kinder seems 's 'ough I ketched cold in that 'ere dumbled taown haouse," said Joseph, snuffling. "I du reg'lar 'most every March meetin'."

"I guess we all did," Sam urged, with a weak little laugh.

"Well, gran'pa," the stranger said, steadying his voice, "where be you stayin'? Or shall we go over to the hotel?"

"I — I don't stay nowheres, — not yit," grandfather replied.

"The' hain't no hotel!" growled Gran'ther Hill, "nothin' only Harmner's cussed tarvern. You 're a-goin' hum 'long wi' me, both on ye, jes' 's yer gran'sir sot aout tu! Come, pile in here, young man. Hurry up yer cakes, Jozeff, an' le's be a-pikin'."

The newcomer demurred in vain, and presently the party went lumbering on its homeward way.

The band chariot of a circus could not have attracted more attention, for the news had run like wildfire through the dispersing assembly that "ol'

Uncle Ros'ill's gran'son had come fr'm aout West arter the ol' man, an' was a-goin' tu take him right off'n the taown."

It was as wonderful as a story out of a book.

The freeholders dispersed from the town house more rapidly than they had gathered. The company of ball players on the common was reduced to the few boys whose homes were nearest. The chimney of the deserted town house was scattering on the wind the last wisp of smoke from the expiring fire as Gran'ther Hill, with his captured guests beside him, driving over the crest of Stony Brook Hill, cast a last triumphant glance back upon the scene.

A SEPTEMBER ELECTION

MRS. HARRIET PIPER'S curiosity was exercised concerning the cause of a peripatetic visit which her husband was enjoying with two influential townsmen who had called upon him one June morning in the imposing array of holiday attire. Brother Foot, a class leader and deacon, wore his bell-crowned hat and black coat of severely formal cut, and his fine calfskin boots, whose toes had acquired a devout upward turn at frequent prayer meetings, and now creaked with something of the Sabbath-day solemnity in their measured cadence as he walked to and fro. His more worldly companion, Roswell Kent, honored the occasion with as much attention to dress. He wore a beaver of the same style, which had not changed in Danvis for twenty years, but his swallow-tailed coat was blue, garnished with shining brass buttons. The deep cuffs were rolled back till the soiled lining was conspicuous above the wristbands of the shirt. Both men wore uncomfortable black silk stocks and broad collars that came high up on their freshly shaven cheeks.

Mrs. Piper's curiosity enhanced the usual alertness of her mien as she craned her neck and pricked her ears to catch a word of the conversation as the

trio passed through the yard and walked toward the barn. She was rewarded by no sound but the exasperating creak of the deacon's boots growing fainter, and as the party entered the barn it was succeeded by the alarmed twitter of the swallows, resounding through the empty bays, mingled with the louder cackle of a hen frightened from her nest.

"I should like to know what on airth them men's up tu, a-shoolin' hether an' yon, along wi' your father?" the brisk little woman said to her comely daughter, who was wiping the last of a pile of milk pans. "If it wa'n't for both on 'em bein' here, I should guess like's not they was beggin' for the minister, but they would n't come tugether for that, bein' the Kents is Universalists, which Solomon Foot 'ld jes' 's soon fellership the ol' Scratch. Your father 'ld ortu give suthin' tu one church or t'other an' not be haounded by all on 'em. 'T 'ld be cheaper an' more sartain. Mebby that's what they be up tu, kinder tirin' one 'nother aout. I du declare, Malviny," she said, as her daughter passed to the open door with a pile of shining tin pans on her arm, "it's turrible aggravatin', the way you go 'raoun', not takin' no more int'res' in what's a-goin' on 'an a post in the fence! Hain't you a-feelin' well?" She noticed the roses in her daughter's cheeks were a little faded, and the luster of her black eyes was less bright than usual, and followed her to the open door, just outside of which Malvina

deftly turned the milk pans on their shelf to sweeten in the sunlight. Her mother, ignoring the clatter, called out, " I guess I 'd ortu fix you up some bone-set or suthin' tu take."

" Shaw! mother, the' hain't nothin' ails me," Malvina laughed, nervously, " but I don't see no use o' stewin' an' s'misin' ababout what you can't find aout till you know."

" You don't s'pose your father's took it intu his head tu sell the place? I 'd ortu go an' find the ol' Dominick 'at stole her nest an' come off wi' a mess o' chickens yist'd'y," she said, after a minute's study. So, putting on a sun-bonnet and taking a basin of chicken feed, she set forth to execute this bit of strategy. But before she reached the barn, wading with lifted skirts through the rank barn grass, pigweed and redroot of the yard, her husband and the visitors came out of it and marched toward the hog pen, for, in fact, he was attending to some belated chores, while they bore him company to economize time and enjoy a critical, neighborly inspection of the premises. As they passed, she noticed that the Deacon was notching tallies in the corners of a pine stick which he carried in his hand, but she caught no words and heard no sound save the contented grunting of the swine, and concluded to await what information her husband might be disposed to give when he came to the house.

He deferred this event by a pretended errand

to the woodshed, and then came with deliberation.

"Well, what was they a-wantin'?" she asked, after more than reasonable waiting for him to speak.

"Where 's Malviny?" he whispered.

"Up in her chahmber. Now, what was it?"

"You can't never guess," said he, with an air of mystery.

"Levi Piper, if you got anything tu tell, why don't you tell it?"

He began impressively, "They want me to run for Legislatur' nex' fall!"

"Shucks!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "They're jest a foolin'. They know 't they can't kill off Peck, a ye'rlin', an' you'll git beat an' be aouten the way for good an' all. Foot an' Kent's both on 'em layin' the' corners tu rep'sent the taown."

"Mebby they be at some futur' time, but they're honest naow in a-wantin' me tu, Har'i't. The's lots 'at won't s'port Peck an' says so, an' Foot an' Kent's got it all figered aout who'll go for me jest tu beat him, an' the's 'nough for tu gi' me a clean m'jority."

"I say as I said afore, shucks! They're jest a-makin' a stool pigin on ye."

"Wall, naow, you women folks do' know jest haow folks is a-feelin'. Le' me tell ye." Levi took an argumentative position, resting his elbows on his

knees, the fingers of his left hand spread and the forefinger of the other ready to count them off. His wife looked at them and permitted herself to listen, with the determination of not being convinced.

“In the first place, the’ ’s sev’ral of the m’litia comp’ny ’at don’t like Peck for keptain, an’ they’ll go ag’in him, twenty on ’em, at the least cal’lation. Then, ther’ s Clapham won’t vote for him ’cause he buys all his groceries tu V’gennes; he’ll kerry twenty votes. Then the’ ’s all the bloomers is ag’in him. Hamner an’ his gang will; but Joel Bartlett an’ what Quakers the’ is, is ag’in him ’cause he don’t come aout, flatfooted, Anter Slavery. Sam Lovel an’ his folks raither favors him, an’ so does the Hillses, but th’s all the Burtons over in the nor’east corner, Beri’s brothers an’ ’mongst ’em, ’at’ll go for anybody fust. Foot’s got ’em all notched off on a stick, for an’ ag’in, an’ he figur’s me aout a m’jority as high as ten.”

Mrs. Piper shook her head. “Then ag’in,” he continued, indicating a fresh finger, “the’s sights o’ women folks’ll like tu see Mis’ Peck took daown a peg, for the airs she puts on ’caount o’ bein’ a member’s wife, an’ they’ll hev influence, as you know, an’ I know,” he added, with the air of one having experience. “You was mentioned by the Deacon an’ Kent as one cal’lated tu adorn s’ciety tu the Capital. Them was the Deacon’s exack

words. It 's usuil, you know, for members' folks tu spend a week or so tu Montpelier durin' the settin'." The delicate hint had its effect upon the worthy Harriet, who was not without aspirations.

"The 's another thing that I speak on only tu you." He went softly to the stairway to assure himself that Malvina was in her chamber, where he heard her moving about and singing softly to herself. "If you an' me favors Andrew Colby makin' up tu Malviny, with a proper onderstandin', him an' his 'n will s'port me, an' that 'll make my 'lection pooty nigh sartain." He placed the tips of all his fingers together and complacently regarded his wife.

"Yes, I know Andrew's fas' for her but she 's turrible sot on Tom Farr, an' I do' know 's she can be made tu hear tu reason," the mother remarked.

"Parental authority an' moral 'suasion 'll go a good ways, an' the' hain't no comparin' the advantages o' the tew men. Andrew 'll hev a good farm an' a sheer o' his father's money 'at 's aout tu int'res', an' Tom hain't nothin' but his tew hands."

"Yes, I know, but Malviny don't look at it that way, an' she 's sot."

"Wal, you talk her inter it, Har'i't," said he, "an' naow, don't you think I'd better jest consent tu run an' put myself int' the hands o' my friends? I lot consib'able on seein' you up tu Montpelier."

"I do' know but what you hed, considerin'," she assented. "If Malviny was tu go up a spell, it 'ld kinder take her mind off 'n Tom. She 's a-lookin' kinder peaked, an' don't 'pear tu take no int'res' in nothin'."

Approaching footsteps put an end to the conversation, but there was no need of more, as the question of Levi Piper's candidacy was settled, as far as he was concerned.

Mrs. Piper took the first opportunity to acquaint Malvina with the part she was expected to play in the coming campaign, and to dazzle her with the glamour of gay life at the Capital, and her silence was taken as consent to offer herself as a bribe to secure the votes of the Colby faction.

In a fortnight the adherents of the two candidates began to fall in line, and as summer advanced the battle was on, and wordy warfare waged on rainy days and evenings at Clapham's, at Hamner's and at Uncle Lisha's shop. On the highways, teamsters hauled alongside and poured broadsides into each other, and even the Sundays were shattered by political discourses during noonings.

Gran'ther Hill maintained, "Peck hain't no sort of a captain, and wa'n't fit for tu rep'sent the taown." At last he allowed himself to become convinced that as no military measures were likely to come before the Legislature, he could give Peck his support. In this he was joined by Joseph,

though the latter said, "it did 'most seem 's 'ough Peck wa'n't no more fit tu go to Legislatur' 'n any other man 'at wa'n't no more fit 'n what he was."

Solon's grievance was, "the regular candidate had in some of his speeches in taown meeting used dam-biguous words, which wa'n't in his dictionary nor in his vocalgabulary, nor yet in the English language, wherefore, on which account, I shall not support the present incumbent."

With this single exception the frequenters of the shop were harmoniously united in politics, Sam being a staunch supporter of Peck and Antoine a noisy partisan, very proud of his newly acquired political rights, in which he proved himself an efficient worker.

"They du say," said Uncle Lisha, after a season of silent meditation, one August evening, when the whole company was assembled in solemn conclave, "that the hull b'ilin' o' Burton's Taown Corner 's goin' for Piper, sole an' uppers, ev'ything 'at stan's on tew laigs, even tu ol' Beri's grin'stun 'at 's framed int' the side o' his lawg haouse."

"Yes, I s'pose so," Sam assented, reluctantly. "They all suck through the same straw, an' they 're as sot as a row o' posts, an' you might 's well argy wi' posts."

"Wal, Ah don' care, Ah 'll paid for it an' Ah 'll can lie jes' nat'ral naow sem if Ah 'll was born

here," cried Antoine, gesticulating frantically with his pipe in one hand and the other grasping a pipeful of prepared tobacco. "Le's see; taown meetin's nex' Tuesday. Wal, Monday Ah'll goin' over on dat Burton Corner, me, an' Ah'll goin' for 'lection some."

"'T won't du no good," Sam said. "They're goin' tu put ol' Beri on the justice ticket, an' that'll fix him, sure as guns."

"Wal, prob'ly, Ah'll can' scairt it," said Antoine, pulling at his pipe, now ablaze.

"Young Colby, he's arter the Piper gal, hot-footed," said Pelatiah, not yet a voter, "so the hull forty-'leven o' the Colbys'll vote for ol' Piper."

It was, indeed, true that the unfaithful Malvina was bestowing her brightest smiles on Andrew, whom the waning of every Sunday saw wending his way to the Piper homestead astride his handsome gray mare, where poor Tom Farr was sure to find her "eatin' post fodder," and his own rightful place in the square room preoccupied, as might be known by the streak of candle light not quite hidden at the edges of the painted curtains. It was quite heart-breaking to think of the two, perhaps even then sitting together on the sofa, slipping inevitably closer as they bent their heads over the steel plates in "The Keepsake," the room's sole book. It was a wonder that the baleful glitter of Gran'pa Piper's coffin-plate on the mantelpiece,

where it occupied a central position between a conch shell and a whale's tooth, did not strike terror to Malvina's perfidious soul.

"Aour Malviny 'pears tu be conductin' herself tol'lable cute," said Levi to his wife one Monday morning succeeding a prolonged prosecution of Andrew's courtship, "She 's fixin' my 'lection sure, an' I hain't a goin' tu forgit it. I 'm a-goin' tu V'gennes an' git the best dress Sutton's got in his store for you, an' the secont best for her, for I don't cal'late tu hev ary one on ye play secont fiddle tu anybody up tu Montpelier."

Mrs. Piper expressed her gratitude effusively, and gave plain directions concerning the style and color of the two dresses. Through the steam of her washing she had visions of social triumphs.

"An' you might as well git you some fine shirt timber an' have Ann 'Lizer make 'em when she makes aour dresses," she said, making silent calculation. "You 'd orter hev ye as many as three, for your old ones is as good as wore aout."

"Peck tol' o' some on 'em, lawyers from Burl'n'-t'n an' sech, as actilly changed the' shirts ev'y day!"

"Good land o' Moses! Wal, they must be awful dirty cre'turs!"

"An' some on 'em flourished clean pocket han'-kerchers even oftener 'n they changed the' shirts, so Peck says."

"Wal, I guess you 've got 'nough o' them tu

answer ; but abaout the shirts, you 'll want ye nine yards o' bleached cotton cloth an' a yard an' a half o' linen, and Ann Lizer won't charge over 'n above fifty cents apiece if she comes right int' the haouse an' makes 'em up 'long wi' me an' Malviny's dresses."

Soon Levi departed out of the steamy precincts of the washing in a radiant halo, out of whose airy fabric he builded, not castles, but legislative halls that arose and shone before him as he journeyed toward Vergennes and ever seemed a little nearer. He was gratified to be recognized as a candidate by some prominent out-of-town people, and flattered to be consulted concerning proposed legislative measures. In anticipation he already felt a law-maker when Hamner, reckoned among his opponents, set forth a decanter of choice Jamaica and said :

"Naow, Mr. Piper, when you git up tu Montpelier, I hope you won't forgit the poor tarvern-keepers, an' 'll help tu git aour licenses put daown kinder reason'ble."

Or when Judge Bradley beamed benignly upon him and said : "Piper, of course you 'll go in for a new court-house. That old barrack at Middlebury is a disgrace to aour caounty."

Mrs. Piper, when taken by neighbors in the pride and perplexities of dressmaking with her daughter and Ann 'Lizer, innocently declared :

“It’s ridic’lous the way I’ve kep’ a-puttin’ off hevin’ me made a dress an’ nothin’ fit tu go no-where, wi’ no tellin’ what may happen. Hevin’ Ann ’Lizer, it seemed well ’nough for Malviny tu hev her a dress an’ him some shirts, an’ make one job on’t.

When the dresses were finished, they lay in state for more than a week on the gay patchwork quilt of the bed in the spare bedroom, where they were exhibited with satisfaction to neighborly callers. The gorgeously painted vase of plaster of paris fruit and the lace pincushion founded on the foot of a broken glass candlestick were no longer objects of casual interest as they stood on the curly maple bureau, although tomato, peach and orange still gave forth the same common, pervading odor of oil and turpentine, and the pinheads shone brightly as ever in various designs.

The morning of the first Monday in September broke from a cloudless sky on the hills and vales of Danvis. One of its earliest beams slid from fir-bristling peak to the green depths of Burtontown, and gave greeting to Antoine Bissette, where he was plodding merrily along a road that followed the winding of a babbling stream, whose voice arose to mingle with the morning song of the breeze, now astir among the woodland steepes. To these, as he trudged briskly onward, flecking off now and then the leaves of obtruding wayside branches with a

coil of rope that he carried in one hand, Antoine added a snatch of an old Canadian song, or his own rendering of some popular ballad of his adopted land. A partridge ran a little way before him and burst into noisy flight, a crow launched itself from a dead tree top and signalled to its comrades the presence of an intruder. As the glen widened and the broad light of a clearing shone through the trees, the clear "Zit, zit" of a meadowlark cut the air to give another token of open fields, into which the fern-edged road now entered.

A log house stood near, and a tall, uncouth man beside it stood curving his long back over a scythe which he bore with all his weight upon a grindstone, one end of whose frame was mortised into the house, the other into two legs standing upon the ground. A tow-headed boy was wrestling with the crank, while the ungreased shaft in its irregular revolutions shrieked the doleful plaint that he might well have uttered. Searching sky and earth for some object of interest to lessen the weariness of his labor, he caught sight of Antoine, and communicated his discovery to the man, who, after a sidelong glance from the scythe, lifted his weight from it and devoted himself to regarding the stranger.

"Good mornny," the latter gave greeting, as he drew near the fence. "Pooty good day dis mornny."

"Mornin'," Beri Burton responded, setting his

scythe against the grindstone and approaching the fence, upon which he hung himself while the boy slumped upon the chips in the most convenient place for listening and staring, and wishing the opportunity might outlast his father's intention of scythe-sharpening.

"Ah guess you'll goin' mek finish you hayin' to-day so you could vote to-morry, prob'ly, ant it?" Antoine asked, in allusion to the old saying he had heard reported at the last gathering in the shop, that a man who had not finished haying by election day had no right to vote.

"Hough!" Beri snorted, resentfully. "I god-done er hayin' more 'n er week ergo. Jus' er goin' ter cuddaown er lel bit er raowen. Guess I be all right for 'lection."

"Ah guess so. Ant he too bad dey ant goin' for be no 'lection to-morry?"

"Hain't goin' tu be none? What in thunder ye mean? Oh, you git aout!" Beri mumbled, in considerable excitement.

"Sartain, ant you hear haow dey all got some smallypoxes bus' aout on der Forge Village! Two cases full of it on Hamner's Tavern. Clapham Clark he got some, one de forge man's got mos' dead of it, an' everybody scare to deat', mos'."

Beri's face grew as pale as uncleanness and sunburn would let it, and he slid hastily along the fence to a safer distance from Antoine.

"Gol dumn ye! You be'n right in ermongst er cussed rotten dise'e an' come up here peddlin' of it? Yer orter be shot!" he blubbered out in mixed terror and anger, and the boy, in vague comprehension of danger, scrambled on all fours to the limit of earshot.

"Oh! no sah, M'sieu Burton," Antoine protested. Ah'll ant be near it — only hear it — an' Ah'll had him, too, gre't many year 'go."

"Yas, they say ye put three Frenchmuns tergether an' they'll breed it," said Beri, reassured and drawing nearer again.

The sound of a strange voice had now drawn to the door his wife, fat, unkempt and slatternly, with a half-grown daughter of like build and general appearance.

"Say, Mum, they all got er smallpox daown ter er village, an' ain't goin' ter have no 'lection. Say, Mum, haow long ergo were I toxicated?"

"'Toxercated! Wall, I reckon when ye hed er las' chance at somebody's jug!" she sneered, and then, in evident alarm, "Who tell'd ye the' was smallpox? I b'lieve ye lie, Be'."

"Him," Beri answered, indicating Antoine with a nod. "He live right handy by er village, an' he know. Say, Mum, when were I 'toxicated for er smallpox? I useter hed er mark here some'eres." He pushed his shirt sleeve to his shoulder and began searching the rough skin for a vaccination scar,

while his wife gave no heed to his question, but beset Antoine for particulars of the ill tidings.

"Ne' mind," said Beri, abandoning the hopeless search and futile query. "You 'll wanter know somep'n sometime."

"An' what brung ye up here for?" Mum Burton asked finally, curiously eyeing the rope.

"Ah 'll was tol' you, ma'am," Antoine answered, with great politeness. "Ah 'll was lose mah leetly caow, an' Ah 'll hear it say he was be straggle off dis way. You 'll ant prob'ly seen him, ant it? — leetly red caow, mos' all spot over wid white, so he look more white as he was red, an' de bes' caow you never see to beat it, sah. Oh, he brimly over de pail two tam, ev'ry day."

He looked into her eyes with a piteous imploring for tidings of the lost treasure, but she, briefly searching her memory, answered hastily: —

"No, we hain't seen or heard o' no sech," and continued concerning what was uppermost in her thoughts. "Gol dumn er ol' smallpox! Can't hev no 'lection, an' it's goo'-bye ter you bein' Square, Be'! It's tew plaguey mean, it is, jes' you got er chance tu be somebody, some 'caount."

She strode into the house and gave vent to some part of her vexation and disappointment upon the unwashed kettles and pans that stood in an untidy congregation on the stove.

Beri dug a shovel-like thumb-nail into the soft

wood of the top-rail in momentary abstracted meditation ; then, as Antoine moved slowly away, straddled over it and walked on beside him, calling back to the house : —

“ I er goin’ ’long up ter Jonerdab’s an’ Peleg’s, an’ ’mongst ’em, ter tell ’em what er rip be ! ”

His wife called back imperatively, “ You send a word ter darkter by that feller to hyper over here an’ impockerlate aour sonny an’ sis an’ all them ter tother haousen what hain’t be’n, an’ tell that feller not ter forgit.”

Antoine did not find his cow ; that was safe at home in her ferny pasture, whither he, too, wended his way when assured that his news was imparted to every inhabitant of Burtontown Corners.

Fine weather for September election is the rule in Vermont, and this particular one was no exception, as gold and blue and green as a bright sun, a cloudless sky and fields rank with lush aftermath and fresh pasturage could make it. Such a day could scarcely fail to bring out every voter and, of course, every boy whom some unfinished “ stent ” did not withhold, and even such was more than likely to break that tyrannical restraint and run away, trusting to luck to escape in the crowd the eye of parent, “ guardeen,” or employer. Many of the womankind improved the rare opportunity to visit friends who lived on the roads to the town house, or in its neighborhood. Farmhouses that

were astir with their own busy life every other day of the year were tenantless to-day, and the hen hawk wheeled low above them, making leisurely selection of the fattest pullets. Fields were so free of human presence that at midday the fox ventured boldly beyond where the wild sunflower shone in the dusky woodside.

Mrs. Piper did not fail to improve the opportunity, and rode with her husband to the village, where she might spend the day at her cousin's and be at hand to get the first news of the election. Malvina chose to stay at home, and when, from time to time, her mother thought of her during the day, she pitied her spending it in the quiet company of the asthmatic house dog, the cat, and the poultry. But as the clock in the kitchen clicked the alarm for eleven, old Lige waddled out to bark wheezily, not in anger or in joy, but in strict accordance with custom, at a smart team which drove briskly up to the horse block and hitching post. The hens uttered a flustered little cackle, the cat jumped upon the window stool to learn the cause of the commotion, but Malvina did not wonder at all when Tom Farr sprang out of a high-boxed buggy. When Andrew Colby drove that way an hour later, in the hope of furthering his suit a little, as he went to election, he was dismayed to meet the couple driving in the opposite direction, both dressed in their best, and looking very happy.

“ Dam the hull bilin’ ! I’ll larn him to be foolin’ wi’ me ! ” he growled back at them over his shoulder. “ Not a identical Colby vote does ol’ Piper get this day ! ”

He laid the lash to his horse in his haste to make good his word, while Tom and Malvina bowled merrily on their way to the first minister or magistrate they might find in the next town.

Two hours before noon the dreary old town-house and its precincts swarmed with the male inhabitants of Danvis. For the most part, the elderly, middle-aged, and staid men, and the town officers, were gathered inside the bare walls, while the younger men and boys chose the more cheerful outdoor atmosphere, some lounging upon the grass in shade and sunshine, some in groups discussing the chances of the candidates, or watching the contest of a pair of wrestlers or stick-pullers. One great centre of attraction was a booth of boards built against the side of the town-house, where, for sale, were home-made cakes and pies, and cookies, crackers and cheese, highly colored with annatto, popularly known as “ otter.” There, too, were some jars of candy, in sticks striped like a barber’s pole, and balls similarly decorated, and cigars, at a cent apiece. The purchaser of one was fortunate if it would draw — or, considering the flavor, quite as much so if it did not. There were a box of dry, sugary raisins, a drum of ancient figs, and a basket

of puckery pears, and for those who thirsted for milder potations than Hamner's bar offered, there were bottles of mead and a cask of home-brewed spruce beer. The proprietor was kept busy with a brisk trade, which increased as noon approached and the far-comers grew hungry.

"Hain't got no drawin' plasters ter sell, hev ye, Joshaway?" John Dart asked when struggling with a warped cigar. "No? Wal, you'd ort tu; I want one tu put ont' the back o' my neck to draw the smoke through this 'ere seegar."

The ancient joke was honored with a salute of laughter not at all relished by Joshua, who declared, "That's baout as good a box o' cigars as ever I hed — 'most every one on 'em 'll go."

"Wal, this one hain't no exception," said John Dart; "it goes aout every time. Lord, it 'll ruin me a-buyin' matches for it. Gi' me a hunk o' that 'ere pink-eye cheese an' a han'ful o' crackers, an' I 'll save this seegar till I git where the' 's a stiddy fire."

At one o'clock the meeting was opened by the constable, who took off his coat preparatory to the labors before him, and the voting began. The dignitaries sitting in the seat of honor gave him their ballots, which he deposited in their respective boxes, an odd array of makeshifts. Some were square lozenge boxes with sliding covers, some round with covers that slipped on, on each of which a strip of paper was pasted whereon appeared in faded ink

the words, "State," "County," "Representative," "Justice." The open space in front of the desk, and then the aisle, were soon crowded ; for every one seemed possessed of the idea that everything depended on his vote being cast immediately, and there was some pretty rough elbowing and hustling, but all in the best humor, for no one took in ill part a trodden toe or a punched rib.

Gran'ther Hill was in the thick of the crowd, without power to move but as it surged forward or swayed from side to side, yet holding his open ballot aloft like a banner.

"Quit yer con-dumned shovin'!" cried a stout young fellow behind him, pushing backward lustily. "You 've most squoze the breath o' life aout 'n this ol' man!"

"Never you fear, young man!" the veteran growled huskily over his shoulder. "I 've stood wus rackets, an' hain't nigh dead yet! 'Tain't a primin' tu gettin' aout 'n Independence! I 'll get up ter the breastworks an' gi' 'em a ha' bushel o' Pecks!"

Levi Piper sat in a corner among a group of staunch supporters, looking smiling and confident, spite of the discomfort of wearing his best suit, which he had donned out of respect to his position, when Brother Foot, who had been on a tour of inspection among the assembled freemen, made his way to him bearing a troubled countenance.

“What’s the rip?” he whispered anxiously.

“Andrew Colby’s a-peddlin’ votes for Peck faster ’n a boy a-killin’ snakes, an’ Beri an’ his company hain’t one on ’em here, not a identical one!”

The smile faded from Levi’s face like sunshine from a landscape beneath a passing cloud.

“Andrew!” he gasped. “Why! he promised me fair an’ square, an’ I’ve done all I agreed.”

“Can’t help it,” said Foot, sadly. “I see him at it a-givin’ a Peck ballot to his father an’ tew brothers an’ a-offerin’ on ’em right an’ left. ’Peared to be mad as a settin’ hen baout suthin’. ‘Damn his lyin’ ol’ soul,’ them was his words speakin’ o’ you, the blasphemin’ sinner. ‘Damn his lyin’ ol’ soul!’” Second-hand profanity, being cheap and sinless, had attractions for the Deacon.

“An’ the Burtons hes all gigged back on me! I’m a gone goose!” Mr. Piper groaned, as if the curse were already taking effect, and he wandered away to Clapham’s horse shed to brood over his blasted prospects. All his visions of triumph and honor had suddenly sunk in a gloomy mist, and already he suffered the humiliation of defeat, and reviled himself for the useless and reckless expense of the two new dresses and the three shirts. The black silk dress might serve to assuage his wife’s disappointment, and the yellow poplin recon-

cile Malvina to the loss of a lover and of the honor of being a representative's daughter, but he could never wear those shirts without being reminded of the high place for which they were intended. He cursed the day in which he had been persuaded to be a candidate, and thenceforth renounced all political aspirations.

From his retreat he could see the voters entering the townhouse and made mental note of the known or supposed preference of each. "The 's more 'n half on 'em agin me 'at I know on an' I was a cussed fool ever tu run! Blast ol' Foot an' his Metherdist soft soap! He jest wanted tu see me beat! There goes the Farr tribe, all in a chunk, an' all agin me. Cy' an' his boys, Bial an' his'n, thirteen on 'em. All but Tom; wonder where he is? Poor Tom, he 's enough sight likelier 'n Andrew, an' I'd a good deal druther hev him in the family. Wal, I won't slink araound here like a scairt fool — but I swear I wish 't I was t' hum a pickin' up stun!"

He brushed the cobwebs from his sleeve and returned to the townhouse, trying to appear unconcerned, though unable to force a smile to his dry lips. The votes were dropping slowly now, the constable found time to exchange a few words of conversation with the dignitaries beside him or some of the interested group that crowded in front of the desk watching the ballot boxes as if their eyes might

penetrate the wooden shells and discover the secrets they held. Joel Bartlett, the town clerk, had a respite for his fingers from the incessant scribbling of names as the constable called them to him, and for his tongue from keeping time to the motion of his fingers.

The constable looked at his watch and called out, "Are your votes all in, gentlemen? The box will be turned in five minutes."

A rapidly driven wagon stopped in front of the door, and in a moment Tom Farr came hurrying in and up to the voting place, where he handed his ballots to the constable.

"Forward your ballots, gentlemen," the constable called again, and then announced that it was three o'clock and the box would be turned.

After a minute of grace, during which no uncast ballot was offered, the box containing the votes for representative was emptied upon the desk and the counting by the authorized officials began, while the crowd of self-constituted inspectors pressed closer and craned their necks to see which pile grew the faster as the names of Peck and Piper were added to each.

Since he had become assured of the disaffection of the Colbys, and the no less unaccountable absence of the Burtons, Levi Piper had so fully accepted the certainty of defeat that the first sharp pain of it was over and he was able to meet with a

good deal of calmness the ill-concealed triumph of enemies and the sympathy of friends, which were shown in the faces of each, as he sauntered from group to group.

"Hev they got them votes 'baout caounted?" some one asked from another who had just come from the townhouse.

"Pooty nigh."

"Be a ch'ice fust time?"

"D' yas — hain't none scatterin'."

"Ary chance for Piper?"

"Daa! The Colbys all turned agin him, an' the' hain't one o' ol' Beri's tribe ben a-nigh."

"Gentlemen, please give your attention," the voice of the constable was heard issuing from the open windows above the hum of many voices.

The whittlers hastily shut and pocketed their knives, the loungers in the grass scrambled to their feet, the story-teller left his tale unfinished, and all made haste to get within closer range of the speaker's voice.

"Hul number of votes cast, tew hundred an' one. Ne'ssary for a ch'ice, one hundred an' one. Of these, Piper hes received one hundred an' one — Peck, one ——"

The concluding figures were drowned in a tumultuous billow of cheers, and, as it subsided in an echo of belated voices, the constable announced what every one knew.

“And you have made ch’ice of Levi Piper to sarve you as representative.”

Quite dazed and scarcely believing his ears in the confirmation of friendly congratulations, Levi Piper was hustled into the townhouse, and mounted upon a seat where he vainly tried to recall the speech, once well conned, but now forgotten, useless, and never to be spoken. He managed to thank his friends in a few stammering words, and then to deliver to their free raiding all things eatable and drinkable that the huckster’s booth still held, for such was the custom of those times, and one which gave quite as much satisfaction to all concerned, especially to the successful candidate, as does the modern reception.

“Well, father an’ mother,” said Malvina, radiant with smiles and the glory of the yellow poplin as she met her happy parents at the door upon their return, “I run away an’ got married tu Tom whilst you was gone, but you’d ort tu forgive us, seein’ ’at you’ve got the ’lection, an’ it was Tom an’ his folkses’ votes done it for you.”

“What!” her father gasped, sinking into a chair and making no opposition to Malvina sitting on his knee. “You an’ Tom merried? Him an’ his folks voted for me? Wal, I swear! everything beats everything else tu-day! No, sir; I’m almighty glad you be merried tu Tom, for that Andrew Colby’s a skunk — a mean skunk!”

It was noticed that for some weeks after election Antoine avoided the highways and public places in daytime; in fact, Uncle Lisha's shop was the only place where he appeared abroad.

"You don't want to let that ol' Beri Burton git a holt on ye, Antwine," said Uncle Lisha one evening when the company were gathered there. "They say he's swore tu kill ye for that yarn you told him 'fore 'lection. 'T was pooty tough, an' I do' know but he'd ort tu."

"Wal, Ah don' care 'for me," Antoine protested, while he ground the tobacco nervously in his palms. "An' he 'll ant want for care, too, 'cause hees man's gat de 'lected, an' he 'll was square, heesself. Oh, but Ah tol' you, Ah 'll was come pooty nigh for beat it, honly for dat gal. She was marry more vote as Ah could scare."

RASPBERRYING IN DANVIS.

“WAL, I do’ know but what they be pretty tough on ol’ folks wi’ short laigs an’ petticoats,” Sam Lovel soliloquized, with unwonted sympathy for his mother-in-law, as he paused at the threshold after climbing the steep back stairs, and looked down at them, considering the helpful addition of a hand rail. “Wal, sometime, mebbby,” and so giving the matter present dismissal, he entered the kitchen with his carefully borne burden, an improvised basket of birch bark filled with raspberries.

“My sakes alive, where did you git them?” cried Huldah, dropping her sewing upon her lap as he set them on the table before her. “Jest look, Aunt Jerushy. Mother, did you ever see bigger rosbar-ies?”

Sam, till now having no eyes for any one but his wife, became aware of the dumpy, inert figure of Mrs. Purington sitting in the easiest rocking chair, where the coolest draught of south wind came through the open door.

“Why, mother Purington, you here? Hain’t it cur’ous. I was jest a-thinkin’ ’baout ye as I come up the steps.”

“An’ naow I s’pose you ’re thinkin’ the rest on ’t,

‘the devil’s allers nighest,’ an’ so fo’th,” she said, in an injured tone, as she hoisted herself ponderously from the chair and waddled over to the table. “Hm-m-m, yes, tol’able decent baries, but they hain’t so big as tame rosbaries, the biggest on ’em hain’t.”

She searched her waist for the longest pin it held and spitted the largest and ripest berry upon it. “Naow that hain’t nothin’ tu a tame rosbarry, tu look at nor tu eat,” and she tested the last quality with a critical smack.

“Proper nice they be,” said Aunt Jerusha, with hearty approval.

“They’d ortu be, for a man tu spend his time a-pickin’ of ’em,” said Mrs. Purington, impaling another choice berry and casting a severe glance at Sam and Huldah, who seemed as unconscious as the berry of the thrust.

“I’m dreadful glad you did, Samwel,” said Huldah. “Where did you find ’em?”

“Over where we chopped two years ago. I come on tu ’em when I was a-lookin’ for the young cattle, an’ the’ was more’n you can shake a stick at in a fortni’t. I jest made me a basket and went at ’em. Antwine’s womern’s in there with her hull litter, a-pickin’ wi’ both hands. You women folks got tu hyper ’f you want to git any for sass an’ dryin’.”

Huldah held at arm’s length the garment she was making, considering its proportions and the ques-

tion of berry-picking together, yet separately, before she answered.

"Why, I do' know but what we might go to-morrow, the hull toot on us. Don't them sleeves look long, or don't they? We can shet up the house an' all go, an' not git no dinner. Come here, Bub!"

"Haow long be you goin' to Bub that boy?" Sam asked impatiently, and then, "Where is Bub, anyway?"

"Haow long be you?" Huldah asked, laughing.

If Sam had listened he need not have asked the whereabouts of the child, for his shrill voice could be heard coming from the shop, mingled with the deep tones of Uncle Lisha, and the regular strokes of the hammer on awl and pegs. And now the two entered the kitchen, the child in response to his mother's repeated call, Uncle Lisha to learn the cause of the unusual commotion.

"What's all the haowdelow abaout?" he demanded, regarding the company under his lifted glasses.

"Oh, it's Bub's sleeves an' rosbaryin'," Huldah answered. "Come here, Sammy, an' let mammy see. Wal, there, what it shrinks wi' washin' 'll make it all right," she declared triumphantly, after measuring the sleeve of the check apron by the child's arm.

"I did n't s'pect nothin' but what you 'd spilte it," said her mother, in some disappointment.

"An' we're all goin' rosbaryin' to-morrer," Huldah explained to Uncle Lisha. "Sam says the' is sights. See what he fetched. Hain't them beauties?"

"Not ekal tu tame ones," Mrs. Purington protested as she speared another fine specimen and conveyed it to her mouth.

"If you'll pick 'em over we'll hev 'em for supper, Aunt Jerushy," said Huldah.

"They'll need lots o' sugar," said Mrs. Purington; "they're turrible sour."

"An' we've got lots 'at was made a purpose tu sweeten things," her daughter cheerfully declared; "an' as I was a-sayin' we're all a-goin' to-morrer; you an' Aunt Jerushy — an' you'll go, won't ye, mother?"

Mrs. Purington shook her head doubtfully. "I don't b'lieve I feel well enough tu stan' the traip-sin' an' the heat an' the muskeeters, an' ju' like as not run on tu a hornet's nest, an' I should n't wonder if it up an' thundered by tu-morrer an' give us a soakin' if the lightnin' don't strike us. Sis might go, mebbey."

"Good airth an' seas! Yes, I'll go if I c'n git the wax off 'm my fingers so 's't the baries won't stick tu 'em. An' mother, she'll go," said Uncle Lisha, "she hain't so temptin' to muskeeters an' wasps as what you be, Eunice. I do' know 'baout lightnin', but she won't water-soak."

“Mebby Briggses folks an’ Hillses would luf tu go,” Huldah suggested.

“Wal, if Gran’ther ’s goin’ I don’t want tu,” Mrs. Purington declared.

“Send word you ’re a-goin’,” said Sam.

“Me want to go, mammy. Can’t me go, mammy?” pleaded the child.

“Of course, mammy’s man ’s goin’ tu ta’ care of mammy,” his mother said, smoothing the curly pate with her fingers and stooping to kiss the upturned earnest face.

Word was sent to the chosen neighbors, and a general movement of the combined force upon the berry patch was planned for the next day.

If these worthy people had deemed themselves such special objects of divine favor that they would be given the weather they prayed for, they could hardly have suggested to infinite wisdom any improvement on the day, which they thankfully accepted as a happy chance, not as one made to their order. Not one of Mrs. Purington’s thunderheads lifted its pearl and silver dome above the green barriers of the mountains; the only semblance of clouds were snow-white shreds, drifting across the blue sky like thistledown, dissolving in the blue expanse, fleeting as their shadows on the green earth beneath. It was a north wind that blew these films of vapor across the azure dome, and it tempered the rays of the July sun to a degree of moderation

that tempted forth even Mrs. Purington. Shortness of breath and the presence of her declared enemy, Gran'ther Hill, kept her with the rear of the straggling column, where she claimed the frequent assistance of her daughter Polly, and received encouragement from Aunt Jerusha.

Now the company halted beside the little brook that divided the open fields from the frowsy, half-cleared border of the forest, like a crinkled silver thread beaded with amber pools and carelessly dropped between pasture and woodland. Its liquid music, ever slightly changing with the rolling of a pebble, the sway of a dipping branch or the movement or stranding of some drifting twig, the plunge of a frog or scurry of a scared trout, chimed with the jangled melody of the bobolinks on one side and the tentative fluting of the hermit thrush on the other, distinctive voices of field and forest.

Some one dipped up a tin pailful of cold water, and Sam was shaping a dipper of birch bark with a cleft stick for a handle, when Mrs. Purington arrived at the brookside with her youthful and aged escorts.

"Dear me, Sis! I hev got tu se' daown an' rest me!" she panted, surveying the ground critically, and pointing to a cradle knoll where native winter-green and foreign herdgrass crowded each other for supremacy. "Sis, you poke in there, an' see if that hain't a snake a-wigglin' the grass."

"Law sakes, Eunice, the' hain't no snakes 't would hurt ye," Aunt Jerusha, already comfortably seated, said encouragingly.

"I don't care, it'd scare me tu death to see one! It allers did!"

"I don't like snakes nuther, an' I wish 't one would git a mou'ful on ye," Gran'ther Hill growled grimly, setting his toothless jaws till nose and chin almost met. "By the Lord Harry, the'd be one sick sarpent!"

If Mrs. Purington heard him, she affected ignorance of his unpleasant words, as she seated herself upon the knoll when Sis had thrashed it with a stick, and fanned herself with her apron, blowing a stertorous counter blast from her puffed lips while she waited her turn at the passing pail and dipper.

"When you kinder come tu think on't," said Joseph, with a view to giving the conversation a more pleasant turn, "it seems 's 'ough it was kinder cur'us 'at the' wa'n't no ugly snakes here, that is to say, not rael pizen ugly, I mean. Eels is abaout the wust to look at, erless 't is mud turkles."

"Mud turkles! You must be a cussed smart boy," said his father, with withering contempt.

"Wal, ye see, I was kinder takin' in all sorts o' riptyles," Joseph explained, "crockerdiles, ye know, an' scorpions, an' hippy Thomases, an' bats, an' — an' —"

"Clams an' crows, mebbby," his father suggested, with bitter sarcasm.

"We hed ortu be thankful 'at we live in a free and enlightened kentry," Solon Briggs remarked, "an' not in metropical desarts, where boar-construc-tors an' animal condors, an' tigers, an' centerpedes haowl an' roam at large as frequent as they be in a mennygery, only not incarterated in waggins."

"There's one advantage, — you don' hafter pay a quarter tu see 'em," said Sam.

"No quarter give or took an' childern throwed in where there's crockerdyles," said Solon, with unwonted levity.

"There was here oncte Injins an' Tories an' Hessians," said Gran'ther Hill, "an' would be yit if it hed n't ha' b'en for John Stark, an' Ethan Allen, an' Seth Warner, an' Peleg Sunderlan', an' George Washin'ton, an' 'mongst us."

"Oh, Sam Hill, Ticonderogue an' Bennin't'n's comin'," Joseph groaned under his breath, and then audibly suggested, "It mos' seems 'ough we'd better be a-moggin' if we're a-goin' tu git many baries."

"Oh, say, father, le's set here an' hear Gran'ther tell 'baout fightin'," young Josiah whispered earnestly. "It's lots more fun 'an the plaguey baries."

But the inclination of the majority was adverse, and he unwillingly attached himself to the rear as the party advanced to the berry patch, whither

Maria Hill, Jane Briggs, and Huldah had already proceeded, and where glimpses of their green and white sunbonnets and their shoulders could be seen as they arose from the thickets of raspberry bushes or emerged from clumps of lusty young saplings.

Many acres were covered by briars and saplings, with which nature was hiding the ghastly wounds inflicted by axe and fire, here and there embroidering the green veil with white splashes of fireweed and pink sprigs of willow herb. Bees fared busily to and from these, and butterflies drifted idly among them like vagrant blossoms.

On the far side, the stately wall of virgin forest stood, a palisade of gray trunks, coped with deciduous trees and evergreen verdure. The bushy tract was thriddled by a labyrinth of cattle paths, along which the party scattered singly and in couples, each engaging according to individual zest in the holiday labor that had brought them there.

Josiah kept close to his grandfather in the hope that the environment might suggest some story of bush-fighting or hunting adventure, and both forgot berry-picking when they flushed a brood of partridges and watched the young birds, no bigger than robins, fluttering away in divers directions, as strong of wing as July woodcock, and then listened while the mother softly sounded her gathering call. Sam was more intent on noting whither the full-fed bees flew than on filling his basket. Uncle Lisha,

more industrious, but awkward, wasted much time in comparing the contents of his basket with that of Aunt Jerusha's, till he bethought him of the old trick of boyhood and covered the bottom of his pail with a thick layer of leaves. Solon and Joseph fraternized on the basis of doing as little as possible. Therefore the burden of the fruit harvest fell upon the womankind, to whose nimble fingers it came more naturally than to the clumsy digits of their lords, which seemed, more than ever, all thumbs. Even Mrs. Purington's hand flew with swift regularity back and forth between bush and basket, freighted with berries that she confessed scarcely inferior to some she had seen in the village garden of a bloomer, and became so interested in securing them that she grew indifferent to attacks of mosquitoes, and lost her fear of wasps and snakes.

Polly Purington and Ruby Hill exchanged girlish confidences, but kept their fingers as busy as their tongues. Huldah, with her boy clinging to her skirt, and the wives of Solon and Joseph close at hand, led the van well up toward the old woods, where the bushes bent lowest with their burden of red, ripe berries.

Suddenly Huldah became aware of the stooping figure of a woman at a little distance, who, becoming erect, disclosed beneath the wide-brimmed straw hat the broad, brown face of Ursule Bissette, expressing first surprise, then annoyance quickly

masked with effusive good-humor, as she gave greeting in a deep, masculine voice : —

“Good mawny, Mees Lovel. Ee naise mawny, ant ee? You fan’ plenty berree?”

“Good mornin’, Ursuly. Yes, we find sights on ’em, an’ the further we go the thicker they be.”

“Ah, ee ant mos’ any dees way,” pointing toward the woods; and then unaware that Huldah had seen the large, nearly filled milk pail before it was hastily hidden behind a thicket, “Me, mah chillen ant gat mos’ any lee’l one, oup dere, all dis morny. Me try for gat few for sell on de village for bought me clo’s for mah chillen, mais, me ant gat honly tree, four quart mos’,” and she sighed deeply.

“Why, you can get a bushel of ’em down here ’most anywheres,” said Huldah, exhibiting her half-filled basket in confirmation. “But I ’m goin’ up nigher the woods to see what the’ is, for I ’m coming to-morrer wi’ a bigger dish.”

“Oh, don’ you go no funder, Mees Lovel,” said Ursule, assuming a most horrified expression, “dere was up dere, w’at you call — awhh — bear! Oh, hol’ hugly! Me hear it gro’l lak t’under! Mah chillen hear it too, if you ant b’lieve. Pierre, Matilde, Joe, lee’l Antoine!” she called lustily. “Viens ici, fore bear gat you!”

A girl and three boys varying from ten to fourteen years old appeared from various quarters. Their

mother spoke to them rapidly in French and then asked : —

“ Ant you hear some bear in de hwood, lee'l whal 'go? Hein? ”

The boys nodded a shamefaced assent, poking the mould with their naked toes and casting furtive glances at Huldah, but the girl, older and better trained, answered boldly, looking straight at her mother : —

“ Yas, hear two bear — mos' see it,” and volunteered further additions to the terrors of the place, “ an' un bête a grandcue. Oh, ee squeal, hugly ! ”

Ursule turned triumphantly to Huldah. “ You see, mah chillen ant never tol' lie. You go, bear keel you, prob'ly ! ”

Huldah regarded her with an amused, half contemptuous smile.

“ Oh, I guess the' won't no bears tech us 'f we don't meddle wi' 'em. I 'm a-goin' to resk it, anyways. Come, Marier, and Mis' Briggs ! ”

“ Oh, ee heat you lee'l boy, me tol' you. You see, bambye ! Me goin'. Come, chillen, 'fore bear ketch you ! ” and marshalling her brood before her she took a divergent path down the long slope.

“ Le's go back,” said Maria Hill, who, with Jane Briggs, had heard the conversation. “ Don't you see she's gone ? ”

“ Yes, we 'd better,” Mrs. Briggs urged.

“ Sho ! Be you goin' to let that critter scare ye

to death wi' her bugaboo stories?" said Huldah scornfully. "Could n't ye see she was lyin', an' her pail more 'n half full o' baries? Gone? She jest scooted back up there as soon as she thought she was aout o' sight, but I see her straw hat floppin' along behind the bushes. All she wants is to scare us away from the best pickin'. Come on!"

Thus assured, her companions followed her, though somewhat timidly, Maria declaring, "I can't help feelin' skeery after what she said."

Presently Huldah, leading her boy by the hand, came into the old wood road, its ruts dried into stony beds of dry rivulets and half-healed scars of sled runners showing on the naked roots. Its low border of ferns was overtopped by a hedge of heavy-laden raspberry bushes and blackberry brambles not yet out of bloom that promised an abundant later fruit harvest.

They followed the rough path but a little way before their baskets were filled, and as they halted to rest before returning Huldah spied a broken sled, a forlorn, deserted wreck, with its beam pins on one side broken and one runner sprawled flatwise, half buried in dead leaves and overgrown with ferns, and a sapling of two years' growth springing up through the socket that held the roller.

"Wal, there, that 's what I call shiftless, whoever left it a-layin' here," she declared, with a slight disgust. "If 't was Samwel, he ortu be ashamed.

None o' the irons saved — wood shoes, though. And the stakes left in, tew, good hardhack ones, sound as ever they was."

She drew one from its socket, and was examining it when the attention of all was attracted by an outcry of alarm that suddenly arose just beyond the turn of the road. Then Antoine's children broke into view, running at top speed, the long-legged girl in the lead, the mother crowding the rear at a remarkable pace for one of her build.

"Tryin' another plan to scare us off," Huldah laughed, after the first surprise. But when the girl dashed by pale and gasping, her brothers closely following, catching their breath in broken sobs, and Ursule pounding along at a pace that shook disjointed fragments of prayer from her lips at every step, it was evident that all were impelled by an unfeigned terror.

An instant later its cause appeared in the form of a great gaunt she-bear, her beady little eyes twinkling viciously, her white teeth gleaming out of her open jaws, and her ragged, faded coat flapping in jerky undulations as she plunged onward at an awkward gallop.

Huldah instinctively drew her boy behind her as she took a step backward, and swung the sled stake above her shoulder, for there was no time nor way for flight. Just as he passed her, little Antoine tripped upon a naked root, and his mother,

close at his heels, plunged headlong sprawling over him, raining a shower of red berries far before her.

The bear in hot pursuit was almost upon her prostrate foes, when Huldah, putting every ounce of strength in the blow, brought down the heavy cudgel across the beast's back with such paralyzing effect that the hinder parts crippled down helplessly. Down came the club again on the skull, cutting short a whining growl of pain and rage, and the bear sank down with outstretched paws and relaxed jaws almost within reach of Ursule's feet that were wildly hammering the ground in a last desperate effort of defense.

Huldah dealt repeated blows upon the head until the bulging eyes stared fixedly and there was no answering quiver of muscles when the stroke fell; and then, her own strength almost as completely gone, she dropped her weapon and sank trembling to the ground, clasping her dazed child convulsively to her breast.

At the first appearance of the bear, Huldah's companions, who were seated on the standing rave of the broken sled, arose simultaneously and attempted a retrograde movement into the bushes; but Jane Briggs's heel caught on the rave, and she fell prone upon her back into a bed of ferns, carrying Maria down with her and plunging both of her elbows into the two baskets of berries, and there

the two women lay, discreetly silent for fear of giving their whereabouts to the enemy.

When Ursule became assured that she was not in the clutches of her pursuer, she rolled herself off her half-smothered son, and grasping him by the arm as she regained her feet, tore down the road at break-neck speed, uttering discordant shrieks, to which Antoine, the younger, piped a shrill accompaniment.

When the outcry grew faint in the distance Maria Hill called cautiously : —

“Huldy, Huldy, be you killed?”

“No, I hain’t, Marier, but I b’lieve the bear is,” Huldah answered, in a voice between laughing and crying.

“What! you don’t say! What killed him?”

“Why, I s’pose I did, erless he died o’ somethin’ sudden. It’s a she one, I guess. Sam says they’re ugly when they’ve got young ones.”

“You killed her? Why, Huldy Lovel, what be you talkin’? Be you crazy?”

Maria and Jane scrambled to their knees and stared in new alarm at Huldah sitting limply on the wrecked sled, with the boy in her arms.

“The critter’s gone arter them French! That is what! I heered ’em yellin’ bloody murder,” said Jane Briggs.

Huldah bent forward, looking fixedly at the motionless form of her late antagonist.

"No, she's dead. There's flies lit on her eyes and flyin' into her maouth. Come an' look! Ugh! don't she look ugly yet?"

Huldah stood up and her comrades came forward timidly.

"An' you killed her. Haow did you?" Maria asked, still incredulous.

"She was most on tu Antwine's womern, an' I give her a lick ont' the back wi' that ol' stake, an' somehaow it stopped her. An' then I give it to her with all vengeance over the head till she lay still. Oh, I don't know haow I done it, only, thinkin' o' that womern an' her young uns!"

"Oh, oh, Hu-Huldy Lovel! You be the be-beat-in'est of all women 'at ever I see, so there!" Then, breaking down completely after struggling through this tribute of praise, Maria hugged Huldah and wept upon her shoulder, while Jane Briggs, with more self-restraint, wiped her eyes upon her juice-soaked sleeve.

Presently the men came running up the road, Sam, Joseph and Solon in the lead, for Ursule, meeting them, had told a doleful story of their wives' peril and her own miraculous escape, which she attributed to the interposition of the several saints to whom she had prayed.

The three husbands were greatly relieved when they counted their due allotment of wives, and Sam, saw his boy under Huldah's wing, all standing un-

harmd by the roadside ; and then all stood stock-still in dumb amazement before the dead bear.

"I was goin' to scold you some for leavin' the sled so shif'less," said Huldah, when the other women had told the story of her exploit and shown the blood-stained, fur-clotted stake in evidence, "but now I know you left it just right an' in the right place."

"The sled ? Why, that's the one Antwine borrowed of Joel Bartlett, when he was gittin' aout the treetops I give him. He piled on sech a load, he broke daown."

Sam, Joseph and Solon skinned the bear, and as they bore the shaggy trophy down the road, each with his wife beside him, and little Sammy astride his father's shoulders, Solon, for the first time remarking the crimson stains upon his spouse, asked :

"Why, Mis' Briggs, have you likewise brewed your hands and face in ursuline blood and be'n a-wadin' elbow deep in gore ?"

While she was denying the flattering impeachment and explaining the harmless nature of the apparent battle stains, Uncle Lisha met them with a roar of welcome, and Gran'ther Hill, after bestowing unstinted praise on Huldah, marched at the head of the party whistling toothlessly his favorite military air.

At last the whole company was gathered again by the brook, with the addition of Ursule Bissette

and her children, among whom she sat dejectedly, mourning the loss of her berries and the discovery of the richest part of the field by these intrusive Bostonais.

“Met’ink, Mis’ Lovel, you ought for give me half dat bear,” she whined dolefully, “’cause, you see, me poor hwomans lose mos’ all mah berree for dat bear, an’, you see, if ’t ant for me you ant keel it an’ gat de baounty, prob’ly.”

“It kinder seems ’s ’ough,” said Joseph, breaking the silence which followed this audacious demand, “’s if Mis’ Antwine hed ortu be thankful the bear did n’t git her.”

No one seemed to recognize the justice of the claim except Huldah, who set forth her view of it to Sam.

“Why, yes, I had n’t thought on ’t. But, you see, she was sort o’ bait, a-fetchin’ the bear right tu me ’f I did n’t ral’y want no bear. I guess I ortu give her a leetle suthin’ if I do git the baounty.”

“By the Lord Harry!” cried Gran’ther Hill, glowering at Mrs. Purington and smiling grimly upon Huldah, “I don’t see, Eunice Borden, haow you an’ Pur’nt’n ever come tu have that gal. She hain’t none like nary one on ye. But then you can’t never tell. Jozeff don’t take arter me ner yet his mother. Come, le’s all go hum.”

THE BUTTLES GALS

THE failure of Bascom, the new storekeeper at the Forge Village, fell upon none of his victims more heavily than upon those ripened spinsters who pronounced their name as it was spelled — Buttolph — but who were known to all their townfolks as the “Buttles gals.” They were tailoresses, who made the clothes of half the male inhabitants of Danvis, sometimes at their own home, and sometimes at that of their employer. A few Danvis people who had become tainted with aristocratic ideas had their clothes made by a tailor in Vergennes. A larger number, who were free from such high notions, had theirs made entirely by their own women folks, who treasured almost as heirlooms paper patterns of trousers, waistcoats, and coats, by which the various garments were cut, with occasional variations to conform somewhat to the changes of fashion. When Mrs. Gove lost the pattern of her husband’s trousers she put him to that use, laying him down on the cloth spread out on the floor and marking around his legs with a bit of chalk, but the completed result was not a sartorial triumph, and the innovation was not followed. Exclusive of the few who employed the

fashionable tailor and the many who employed no tailor, the Buttolphs found customers enough to give them a comfortable living and something to lay by for a rainy day. Now, through confidence in an unscrupulous adventurer, these savings were all gone as utterly and hopelessly as if consumed by fire. It was two months or more since the blow had fallen, but the two women still felt stunned by it. They went mechanically about their work, as if in a dream, with a dull, hopeless expectancy of awakening to a less hard reality.

"I don't see what makes folks want to be so wicked," said Lydia, the elder sister, as she ran the hissing goose along a seam. She was a thin little woman, so short of stature that she had to stand on tiptoe to reach the shoulders of her tall customers when she measured them. The flush of youth had faded from her wrinkled cheeks, but there was an afterglow of kindly light shining in her gray eyes that warmed one's heart more than the brighter glances of her sister's black eyes, though the embers of youth still shone beside the corkscrew curls that dangled from each of Nancy's temples.

"What makes folks want to be sech fools?" said Nancy, tossing her curls and twitching at the needle which came reluctantly through the stout "full" cloth.

"You mean us?" Lydia asked.

"Yes, or anybody that 'll go an' trus' anybody

that they don't know no more abaout 'an we did abaout that Bascom."

Lydia considered in silence while she moistened the seam with a bit of sponge wet in a convenient cup of water, and set the goose to more vigorous hissing before she answered.

"I s'pose we was fools, but we hed comp'ny. There's Samuel Lovel, which he'd ha' ben wus off 'an we be if that ore bed hed n't turned up jest as it did, — I wish 't we could find one in our garden, — an' there's Mis' Purin't'n, she trusted him some, she says, herself, an' has tewed more abaout it 'an what we hev, an' that 'ere Jones boy put in nigh a hundred dollars, an' young Varney, he owns up to losin' all his father left him in the bank, an' — wal, I do' know who all, but the's enough of 'em besides us."

"It don't make us aout no less fools 'cause other folks was jest as big ones."

"An' he was a candid 'pearin' man, the' can't nobody deny," Lydia continued, in extenuation of the fools and their folly. "I do' know as I ever see a nicer 'pearin' young man."

"Han'some is 'at han'some does, I say," Nancy declared, with a desperate twitch at the reluctant needle. "There! There goes another o' his needles — jest as onreliable as he is! I sh'd like tu feed 'em tu him."

"Nancy Buttolph!" her sister exclaimed, in mild

reproof. "You know it'd kill him, an' we're tol' tu fugive aour enemies."

"Scissors! You can, yourn, if you're a min' tu; I shan't."

"If your looks did n't deceive you, you did n't allus feel so hard toward him," said Lydia, bearing down on the goose with both hands, while the steam wreathed up about her face and intensified the odor of hot woollen stuff that pervaded the room.

"Puh!" Nancy's scornful ejaculation rose above the sound of her sister's implement, and she dropped the broken needle into the black depths of a crack in the window casing. "It's a pity if folks can't treat folks decent 'thaout a-hevin' it flung in' the' face!"

"You can't deny 't he wa'n't more'n common takin' tu you, Nancy."

"Is the' anythin' cur'us abaout that?" Nancy asked. She did not finish threading the new needle before she studied the effect of the black eyes and the curls in the looking glass in the door of the Seth Thomas clock.

"No, indeed, the' hain't," Lydia assented heartily, pausing a moment as she lugged the heavy goose to the stove to let her eyes follow her sister's and glance at her own unadorned image. She had given up the fight against the inevitable conqueror of youth, and wore a plain white cap like a flag of truce over her thin grizzled locks and time-scored

cheeks, and her dark gown was like a garment of mourning for hopes dead and departed.

Nancy smoothed the hair above her side combs with a moistened needle-worn finger, and gazed out of the window, seeing only the visions of a day dream.

“Wal, that hain’t neither here nor there,” Lydia sighed, “but what I sh’d like to know is what’s goin’ tu become of us?”

“I shan’t go tu Middlebury tu visit Cousin Seliny, that’s one thing ’at ’ll become o’ me,” said Nancy, resuming her sewing.

“I’m dreffle sorry,” and Lydia sighed again. “You ’d ha’ seen so much s’ciety.”

The younger woman looked in the glass again and shut her lips tightly while the other continued:

“I was cal’latin’ ’at we ’d hev this floor painted an’ the walls whitewashed, now the flies is gone.” She looked over the yellow floor to the white wood in the most exposed places, and sighed again.

The scrupulously neat room, warmed by a polished cook stove, was kitchen, sewing-room, and sitting-room. In front of it was the bedroom of the sisters and the “square room,” always dark in the daytime, with its green window curtains down not only for the full display of the remarkable landscapes painted on the outside of them, beyond comparison with anything in the outer world, but also to keep the rag carpet from fading, for in those days a rag carpet was an article of luxury.

"I be turrible glad, though, 'at we got that carpet done an' them curtains, whilst we could afford tu," Lydia said, looking at the door and speaking as if she saw through it. "They make it pleasant for young folks. It don't make much odds tu me, but it's diff'ent with you." She took a snuff box from her pocket and regaled herself with a pinch, whereupon Nancy laid down her work and retired to the bedroom, whence she presently came forth returning a handkerchief to the pocket of her apron and with her nostrils all a-bloom. Snuff taking did not comport with youth.

"I do' know haow nor where we're a-goin' tu git aour winter's wood, ner yet aour pertaters, sence aour gardin dried up so an' did n't du nothin'. I was cal'latin' on the intres' money for your goin' tu Middlebury an' tu git the wood an' pertaters; we c'n git along wi'aout much meat. Oh, hum a day! The Lord giveth an' the Lord taketh away."

"He took away more 'n he give, seem's if. Jest look at Bascom an' aour money, an' the gardin a-failin' up so, an' not skeerce any work a-comin' in; seem's 'ough men folks hed gi'n up wearin' clo's," said Nancy, looking out of the window to a world that at a casual glance seemed clad in universal whiteness by the first available snow of the season. But as the eye dwelt on it, farmsteads asserted their places in gray dots, roofed with deeper blue of shadow and brighter silver of sunlight;

gray patches of deciduous woods bordered and jutted into the white fields; thin gray lines of fences severed farm from farm and field from field, and beyond all these rose the mountain barrier of darker hue, with grizzled black growth, rugged with ridges and ravines that leafy summer never revealed.

"If brother James had n't acted so," said Lydia, returning to her troubles, "an' gone off. Bein' a man, he would n't ha' be'n took in by that Bascom, nor yet ha' let us. The fust Buttolph 'at ever took tu drinkin' as fur as I ever heard — an' him as good a cooper as ever drove a hoop. An' naow he's goin' back an' fo'th sailin' tu the eend o' the airth on that turrible canawl, an' I can't sleep o' nights fur thinkin' of him a-perilin' his life on the deep. An' he might be safe on land a-makin' pork berrils an' cheese casks, which everybody is a-wantin', for they say 'at Uncle Rus'ell Raymond has got most past duin' any sort of a job o' cooperin'."

"It's jest another case o' takin' away," said Nancy, and she made further expression of her rebellious thoughts in the quick, spiteful jerks of her needle.

For a considerable time the sisters preserved a silence that seemed the more intensified by the faint click of the thimbles on the needles, the drawing of the thread through the thick cloth, the tick

of the clock and the snapping of the fire in the stove.

At length Lydia broke the quiet by frugally replenishing the fire, saying as she came from the shed with a few sticks of wood, "When Darkter Stun pays us for turnin' this 'ere overcoat, we shall hev tu git us some wood ; there hain't no tew ways abaout it." Then glancing out of the little window over the sink, she exclaimed, "There's a snag o' teams a-comin' up the hill. It looks like a percession."

"You don't s'pose the' 's a fun'al an' we hain't heard on't?" asked Nancy. "It's jest what anybody might expect, holed up in the winter like woo'-chucks."

The women fluttered to the bedroom window, which commanded a better view of the road.

"'Tain't no funeral," Nancy declared. "It's a string o' wood teams a-goin' tu the village."

Relieved that a funeral had not escaped their attendance, they returned to their work, which was hardly resumed, when they heard the creaking of the snow under many pairs of feet, and heavy-laden runners and the long-drawn shout of five teamsters halting as many yokes of oxen, each with its full sled load of stove wood crowned by a plethoric two-bushel bag.

"What on airth!" exclaimed Lydia, peeping out of the small window with but one eye exposed

to the outer world, while Nancy took as guarded an observation at the opposite side. "Why it's all Danvis turned loose. There's that gre't, awful John Dart 'mongst 'em. Be they all crazy, or what ails 'em?"

"Come, go in, some on ye, an' find aout where the ol' gals want these 'taters dumped and this wood unloaded," Dart called in a tone of cheerful impatience, as he came up from the rear to join the group that stood in bashful hesitation beside the front team. They looked from one to another, each hoping that some one would volunteer for the duty of spokesman.

"You go, Joel," Sam said, when it appeared that no one would offer. "You're uster speakin' in meetin'."

Joel Bartlett slowly shook his head, crowned with a broad-brimmed hat over a woolen cap of sanguinary and most un-Quakerly hue.

"I don't feel clear, Samwel. It is thy place, seein' thee was the fust to stir in the matter."

"No, I only happened tu speak fust; you was all fast enough tu come. Let Solon go in; he can allus find suthin' tu say."

"I hain't legible tu the office," Solon objected; "but here's Mr. Dart, he'd ort tu be oudagious enough not tu be embarrassed."

"You don't ketch me in there alone," said the giant. "I hain't acquainted an' I'm afraid of ol'

maids, an' more 'n all that, Sary Ann 's l'arnt me not tu speak tu no womern but her. We'll send in Jozeff. Come, Jozeff, you hyper in."

After much urging and many excuses and an elaborate clearing of his boots of snow upon the plank doorstep, Joseph Hill knocked and was bidden to enter.

"Good mornin' gals," he said, with great volubility. "Be ye well? An' the chil — I mean your fam'ly, be they well?"

"We are tol'able well, Mr. Hill," said Lydia, hoping he might be a customer, and while she spoke mentally measuring the broad figure before her. "Take a cheer an' set up tu the fire."

"I'm 'bleeged tu ye, I don't care 'baout settin' arter ridin' all the way over here — that is to say, I might ha' rid, only I'd ruther go afoot. I jest run in of an arrent. The fact on't is — the way on't was, you see, Samwel kinder thought mebbby — we did n't know but what you a-hevin sech tormentin' luck wi' that 'ere plagued Bascom, you might be kinder short on 't for your winter's wood — not hev quite so much, you know, as you might ha' hed if you 'd a leetle mite more, you see, an' so, as we all happened tu be a-goin' over tu the village, we jest, each on us, hove on a little jag, an' whilst we was abaout it we kinder flung on a bag o' 'taters, jest tu stiddy the load, an' we don't want tu kerry 'em back, 'cause we all got more 'n we want, an' naow

if you 'll show us where tu empty 'em we 'll onload the wood jist where you say."

When he stopped speaking for want of breath, he was still more disconcerted to perceive that his message was not received in a kindly spirit. Lydia's mouth was pressed so tightly that it was scarcely distinguishable from the wrinkles which surrounded it, and she regarded him with a stare made colder by the glitter of her spectacles, while Nancy's black eyes flashed and each separate ringlet shook with indignation.

"We're turribly obleeged tu ye," Lydia said, "but we hain't objects o' charity."

"When we be," Nancy interjected, "we 'll send you word. You can take your wood an' pertaters right stret home'ag'in."

Joseph was so taken aback by these rebuffs that he could not find a word to offer in apology, but made a precipitate retreat, gasping in a frightened undertone as he joined his companions: —

"Sam Hill! the 'tarnal critters is dref'l pudchiky — madder 'n tew settin' hens! You can't tech 'em wi' a ten-foot pole, not sca'cely, an' they won't hev the wood nor nothin', an' say we c'n take it hum again! Think we're insultin' of 'em. My land!"

"Dum their stinkin' pride," John Dart growled. "What be we goin' tu do? We can't turn 'raound here loaded, an' if we could I wouldn't haul my load back over these cajullucks for it. Le's fling

it off, an' if they don't like it they can lump it."

"An' what 'll we du with the 'taters?" Joseph queried. "Jes' 's like 's not they 'll let 'em stay aout here an' freeze. An' anyways, they don't look 's if any one on 'em could wrastle tew bushel o' 'taters, nor both on 'em together."

"Oh, we can take the 'taters back an' give 'em tu Antwine. He won't turn up his nose at nothin' you give him," said John Dart.

"Perhaps we can persuade Lyddy and Nancy to buy the wood for a small consideration," Joel Bartlett suggested. "They 've got a worldly pride nat'ral tu the old Adam, ag'in takin' charity, an' we 've got tu consider it. If you 'll all fall in with the idee I feel free tu go in an' talk with the gals."

"I 've got the idee. See here," said Sam Lovel, "let 's go in an' git measured for some clo's 'at we 're agoin' tu hev made an' let the wood go toward the pay."

"It looks sort o' desaitful," said Joel, "but I do' know but it 's kinder accordin' tu what was said by one formerly abaout not lettin' the left hand know what the right dueth. Aour women folks do' know."

"If I was 'quainted with these 'ere idgits, I 'd go in an spank 'em," John Dart declared. "But I don't know 'em. Go ahead, Lovel."

"I do' know what M'ri 'll say," said Joseph. "I

hain't said nothin' tu her 'baout hevin' of me any clo's."

"We hain't got tu hev 'em cut till we git ready, only git measured," Sam whispered loudly. Thereupon he made for the door and entered without ceremony, followed by the others crowding upon his heels, except Joseph, who kept well in the rear.

"Good mornin', Lyddy. Good mornin', Nancy," Sam said, heartily, and then without waiting for a return of the salutation, "I'm afeared Jozeff here did n't du aour arrent plain. The idee is, we all on us got tu hev us some clo's, an' we hain't got no money, so we cal'lated you'd be wantin' some wood an' 'taters, mebby, an' we could pay ye, part in barter in advance, an' the rest on't bimeby in cash or in barter, if that kind of a dicker will be agreeable."

"Why, land sakes!" exclaimed Lydia, her countenance changing its severe expression to one of surprise. "He never said one word abaout clo's. He kerried the idee 'at you was a-givin' it all tu us as if we was a couple o' porpers."

"Well, ye see, it kinder slipped my mind. I tol' M'ri 'fore I started 'at I'd got tu hev me some traowers, an' she said she'd lost the partern an' I'd hafter git measured. Sam Hill! I do' know haow I came tu fergit."

"I darsay we can use the wood an' the pertaters," said Lydia, "if we can agree on the price."

Haow much du you gentlemen think they're wuth?"

"Wal, it's all body wood—beach an' maple—an' all ready fer the stove, an' I cal'late it's wuth tew dollars a cord, an' each on us has got a good half cord on, should n't you think the' was?" Sam inquired of his companions.

"Not no more 'n that," said big John Dart; and Solon thought, "That was a-estimatin' on 't liberal," while Joel, whose conscience would n't permit him to assent to such a glaring deception, coughed and made his mouth so round that it almost whistled a note of surprise.

"I sha n't be able tu fetch ye the cloth for a hul suit until I git my sheep shore nex' summer an' kerry the wool tu the fact'ry an' git it made up; but if you're a min' tu measure me naow, I guess I sha n't grow no more," said Dart.

"An' I want thee to cut me a plain coat," said Joel, "single-breasted an' stan'in' collar—thee knows, Nancy—an' skirts not tew full."

"You put crows' feet tu the corners of every pocket o' mine an' three pairs o' buttons on the tails," resumed Dart, "an' if you're a-goin' to measure me, you might as well git out a cheer an' begin at the top, er shall I gi' daown on all fours?"

"While you're a-measurin' him an' Joel, Jozeff an' Solon an' me'll fetch in the 'taters an' put 'em

in the sullen. They 're Buckeyes an' Long Johns an' English Whites, an' 'll be ninepence a bushil. You light a light, Nancy, an' show us the way daown sullen."

With that Sam went out, followed by Solon and Joseph, while Lydia brought her tape line and book and began the measurement of her huge customer, and Nancy handed a lighted tallow candle in its shining iron candlestick to Sam as he passed down the cellar stairs.

"Wal, their 'tater bin's pooty nigh cleaned aout," said Joseph, as he carried his full bag down the narrow stairs and emptied it on the bare boards.

"Some time we've got tu bring them gals some cloth an' let 'em work it up. They'll feel 'nough better," said Sam, laying a brown paper roll on top of the potatoes and going up the stairs.

"I'm a-goin' tu see if this 'ere pork berril corroborates, so to speak," said Solon, hanging his emptied bag on his left arm, taking off the damp cover and holding the candle down inside the cask. "The' 's a leetle layer o' salt left, but not no nutritigious food tu eat. Wal, I shall be killin' next week if it keeps col'."

"It 'most seems 'ough them ol' gals 'd ruther work 'an tu set still. What critters!" said Joseph.

"What was 't Samwel depositoried here?" said Solon.

"Feels like sa'ssiges, er mebbly it's lean meat

fer fryin' er suthin' else," said Joseph, trying the roll with his thumb and finger. "They won't heave it away if they hain't porpers. I don't sca'cely b'lieve they will."

With the cellar somewhat replenished and ten cords of wood under the shed, which Pelatiah had told Sam he would like no better fun than to pile up in good shape evenings, "bein' he could n't be spared no other time," the kindly neighbors departed, leaving something better than food and fuel in the little brown house.

As the sisters watched the slow ox teams going down the hill, Nancy admitted, "Arter all 's said an' done, folks hain't all Bascoms, an' it does seem 's if men folks 'ould hev 'em clo's a while longer."

DISCOVERY OF A NEW WORLD

BUDGE HOPKINS, playing in the back yard between the farmhouse kitchen and the woodshed, had no animate companions but the hens that scampered a few fluttering steps out of his way, as he ran back and forth with his clattering home-made toy wagon. He was industriously collecting sticks that were make-believe rails for a make-believe fence by the hencoop that was his barn.

At length the barnyard was fenced, and stocked with a wagon-load of smooth, cobblestone cows. Budge stabled them, milked them, foddered them and turned them out, again and again, till he grew weary, as many an older farmer does, of the monotonous round of chores. There he sat, gently pushing his wagon to and fro, and listening to indoor sounds.

"Yes," his mother was saying to Martha, the hired girl, "Brush let his place this year, a purpose so he and she could go to the Chicago Fair. They've been gone as much as six weeks, hain't they?"

He could only hear the spiteful thump of the flatiron that emphasized Martha's reply. Mrs. Hopkins proceeded to a long description of the dresses and other costly preparations of Mrs. Brush. Then

Budge's interest keenly revived as he heard his mother say :—

“ Yes, but *he* and I could n't both go, and I could n't go and leave Budge, nor go and take him.”

Budge had never dreamed of coming so near visiting the Fair, as to be thought of in connection with it. He had heard enough about it and of Columbus ever since last fall, when there was such a time at the schoolhouse, and he had recited :—

In fourteen hundred ninety-two,
Columbus sailed o'er the ocean blue.

Now he did n't care about the old Fair. He would rather discover something, and have folks make a fair about it, than to see forty other folks' fairs. There must be a great unknown world beyond the crest of the lofty hill whose wooded eastern incline sloped down to the pasture edge but half a mile from the house.

He had been so far several times with his father and with Nathan for the cows, but beyond their shadowy verge the woods were an unsolved mystery to him. Now Budge's eyes ran to the hills, and he was suddenly filled with a mighty purpose.

“ Mother, gimme some pervisions,” he drawled, going to the kitchen door with his wagon. “ I'm a-goin' discoverin', an' I've got to have pervisions.”

She looked at him with an amused smile as she handed a big, hot, twisted doughnut from a heaped pan.

"I want two. I'm goin' to be gone a year."

"A whole year, Budge!" she said, laughing. "Why then, I guess you *will* want two." With a kiss on his sunburnt cheek, she added a round doughnut with a hole in the middle. Budge dropped them into the wagon box and trundled off toward the lane to the pasture, while his mother never thought of his going beyond the yard. He was a great boy for "playing things."

When he entered the lane his wagon became a ship, sailing along a wide river whose shores were the wall and rail fence, overgrown with elder-bushes, fading goldenrod and blackcap vines, long since robbed by the birds of their last dried berry.

Budge hoped that the country he was to discover might have berry-bushes bearing luscious fruit all the year round, and birds that always sang. No birds sang now over the corn-shocks that stood in the meadows like the wigwams of an Indian village, unless it was a bluebird, chanting, far aloft, a plaintive farewell to departed summer.

He heard the voices of his father and the hired man above the rustle of the cornstalks and the occasional rumble of ears emptied into the wagon. They, too, were talking of the great Chicago Fair.

He voyaged out into the ocean of pasture, touching now and then at ant-hill islands, and coming to where the cows were grazing.

The great creatures raised their heads to stare

curiously at the little figure so unfamiliar to them here. They were walruses, or whales, or some other sea monsters, yet cows so much that he did not fear them.

At last, leaving Spot, Brindle, Cherry and all the rest looking up mildly to get a last glimpse of the broad-brimmed straw hat and little checked gingham blouse, Budge came to the edge of the woods.

When he got well into the woods he found them quite unnavigable for his ship. She ran foul of roots and saplings in a vexatious fashion, and was capsized by a stump. Her stores were all pitched overboard; so now Budge dry-docked and left her. Recovering the provisions, he trudged bravely on.

Presently a large bird — a wild hen he was sure — ran on before him, crying, "Quit! quit!" and then burst away in sudden flight, with a thunder of wings that startled him.

He soon found a doughnut in each hand so inconvenient that he sat down on a mossy log to relieve himself of a part by eating the twisted one. The other was handy to carry because of the hole, into which he could slip two fingers.

The woods were aglow with autumnal colors so bright that they seemed to diffuse light everywhere, and the stray splashes of sunlight were scarcely noticeable. It was so still that when a topmost ripened leaf detached itself from the twig that bore it, Budge could hear it slipping and fluttering all

the way down, and his ear caught the faint tick of its final alighting.

He could not tell how far away the squirrel was rasping a nut nor the woodpecker chiselling a tree, but he could hear the faint patter of their chips on the dead leaves.

Then there was a rustle of feet, till a yellow dog with sharp, black ears and nose, and a beautiful bushy tail came trotting out before him. Becoming aware of him by a whiff of scent, it stopped short and turned its cunning eyes full upon him with more curiosity than alarm. Was this unusual visitor of the woods a two-legged lamb that might afford a toothsome repast?

Budge felt a little queer under the scrutinizing gaze, and making a threatening gesture, cried, "Get out!"

The yellow dog laid back its ears, bristled the hair on its back, uttered a short, gasping bark, sprang out of sight behind a tree, and went bounding off in long leaps that could be heard afar rustling in the dry leaves.

Budge thought he had already found a strange world where there were wild hens and wild dogs wandering at will. There must be more wonderful things beyond. So, getting to his feet, he pushed forward to discover them. With nothing to guide him, and without being aware of keeping his course, he held straight westward.

On the tops of the ledges, where the rocks were padded with cushions of gray moss, he found the huckleberry-bushes loaded with fruit yet unspoiled by frost, and lingered a little to gather a full feast of them — a repast from which many a pretty wild hen took flight at his approach and would not be coaxed back, though he called never so persuasively.

By and by he had passed beyond the brightness of the deciduous trees, and entered the dark shadows of the hemlocks and pines, between whose trunks he presently caught glimpses of sunshine and blue sky level with his eyes.

Budge pushed through some low pine boughs, and stepped forth into the broad sunlight in an open space on the hilltop. Far before him stretched a world more wonderful than he had ever dreamed of.

Away to the west it was bounded by a broken wall of mountains, but little bluer than the sky of which they seemed builded. Nearer were others made partly of blue sky and partly of the autumnal gold of leaves. At their feet lay the blue and silver expanse of Champlain, dotted with white sails.

Nearer him were woods gay as flower-beds, with shining streams winding through them out of green fields where were toy houses and barns and moving cows no bigger than mice grazing in toy pastures divided by toy-fences.

Almost beneath him, where it seemed as if he

might throw a stone, he could see a man much smaller than any boy, herding some of these mites of cattle. Budge could hear his small voice floating up like a queer birdnote, "Whoey! Whoey!"

A great hawk launched forth from a tree-top beneath him and sailed away, screaming, far above the manikin and his tiny herd, upon whom Budge dreaded to see the immense bird pounce. But it melted away to a speck in the hazy air, and was no bigger than a mosquito when it hovered over the miniature trees of the lowlands.

Then he heard a distant rumble, that grew to be a roar, mingled at times with a mellow whistle, and a railroad train came gliding through the plain with a dissolving wedge of vapor briefly dividing the landscape. The roar and whistle echoed back and forth across the wide valley, and made the rock-built hill tremble. Budge wondered how such a little train could make so great a noise, and watched till it crept away into the hazy distance and its thunder died to a low murmur.

His small body was weary with travel, his eyes tired with the sight of many wonders. Lying back on the soft grass, he closed his lids, thinking he would rest a little and then go home and tell all about this beautiful, new, and unknown world.

The afternoon was waning when it occurred to Mrs. Hopkins that it was long since she had seen or heard her little boy. She went to the door and

called, but got no response. Presently Martha took alarm, and the two women looked to see that the cistern was covered, listened down the well, and made a tour of the barns.

“He must ’a’ gone out where they ’re huskin’,” said Martha; but Mrs. Hopkins was much concerned.

It was near chore-time, and she soon saw her husband coming to the house alone.

“Hain’t Budge been with you?” she asked.

“Budge? Why, I hain’t seen him since noon.”

“Oh, dear! Where can he be?” she almost sobbed. “I hain’t seen him since two o’clock. He said he was goin’ discoverin’.”

“Mebby he’s gone with Nathan after the cows,” the father suggested, trying to appear easy. “He’ll turn up all right, Miny; or mebbly he’s climbed onto the haymow and gone to sleep.”

Joel Hopkins made the barns ring with lusty calls, but there was no response save the rebounding echoes and the cackle of startled fowls. Nathan heard the outcry, and hurrying the cows till their hoofs clattered, presently appeared at the barn-yard gate.

“Did you see anything of Budge?” Joel asked quickly.

Nathan hooked the gate deliberately while he pondered the question, then like a true Yankee asked another.

"Why, hain't he round? Wal, now, like 'nough that 'counts for it," he said, with exasperating slowness.

"'Counts for what?" demanded Mr. Hopkins sharply.

"Why," drawled Nathan, "a curious-lookin' mark I seen in the dust up to the end of the lane. It never come to me what it was, but it's the track o' Budge's little waggin; an' I seen it again on a ant-hill 'way up in the middle o' the pastur'. But I never see his track nor nothin' o' him. Mebby he went up to the edge o' the woods lookin' for wa'-nuts."

Nathan was a fox-hunter, and always on the lookout for tracks.

"Joel, you and Nathan must go right up there and look for him," cried Mrs. Hopkins, who had listened breathlessly to the slowly imparted intelligence. "Me and Marthy 'll milk. Oh, dear!" she sobbed, "he said he was goin' to be gone a year, and I'd be happy if I knew I'd see him alive and well as soon as that."

"Pshaw, Mis' Hopkins, we'll find him all right, never you fear," said Nathan reassuringly; but as he retraced his way up the lane he plied his long legs so briskly that it put Joel Hopkins out of breath to keep at his heels.

"If the poor little chap's got turned round in the woods, there's no tellin' where he'll stray to,"

he said, "an' we've got to hustle to find him afore dark. 'Cordin' to the waggin track, he was layin' straight for the woods. Wa' nuts, I guess."

There was no sign of Budge among the hickories, but just inside the woods Nathan's eyes, in whose slow gaze one would never guess there was such alertness, detected the track of the little wagon ; and presently with a whoop he announced the discovery of the wagon itself.

Nathan was the master now, and made Joel keep behind or to one side so that he might not spoil the trail, which was followed with studious care — now by a footprint in moss or mould, now by a broken twig or overturning of dead leaves.

"It does beat all," said Nathan admiringly, as they stopped on a ledge where Budge had made a broad trail through huckleberry bushes, "the way that little critter has stuck to his course. I tell you what, he'll make a regular woods ranger."

When the two men came out upon the hilltop, a few rods apart, it was still lighted by the lingering day, though a distant lighthouse on the lake was shining amid the deepening gloom like a stranded star.

Joel Hopkins shuddered at the thought of the sheer precipice that, just before them, dropped a hundred feet to the rocky slope beneath. There his little boy might be lying dead !

Then he saw Nathan signaling to him silently

with an uplifted arm. In a few moments both men were stooping over a little bunch of yellow straw and checked gingham, half-hidden in the wiry grass. Tall, gaunt, uncouth Nathan called Budge's name so softly, and laid such gentle hands upon him, that the half-awakened child threw his arms about his neck and cried out in a sleepy voice :

“ O mother ! I 'scovered all 'Meriky ! ”

FOURTH OF JULY AT HIGHFIELD POORHOUSE

THERE was scarcely a perceptible abatement of the scorching mid-day heat, though the last rays of the July sun were leveled through the blur of drouthy haze on the Highfield poorhouse, setting aglow its weathered red paint and patches of new clapboards with a ruddier and yellower hue, and sending its long shadow far across the fields to invade the shade of the hillside woods.

But the heat was more unbearable indoors than out. All the inmates of the poorhouse were out in the chip-paved dooryard, lounging in attitudes of mitigated discomfort on the logs left over from last winter's woodpile — chunks of elm whose tough fibres had defied splitting by the paupers' dull axes, wielded with little energy.

Mrs. Warden, the angular and severe-faced mistress of the place, leaned with one arm akimbo in the door, issuing questions and orders in a querulous voice to one and another of the town charges.

Her husband, more portly and better tempered, sat near her, atilt in a wooden-bottomed chair.

The restless eyes of the woman hovered over the group of paupers till they finally swooped down on

one who lay, face down, upon a log, regarding the labors of a colony of ants with listless interest.

"Bart, hev you fed yer hawgs?" she demanded sharply.

The lame Canadian, who sat nearest Bart, gave him a vigorous slap on the back with his greasy wool hat to call his attention to the question.

"Baht, Mees Warden tol' you was you fed de hawg?"

"Consarn it, yaas!" Bart answered, lazily kicking up with one foot toward the point of attack. He added, still gazing at the ants: —

"One of them leetle creaturs is a-tryin' to lug off a dead bug or suthin' twict as big ag'in as he is. Naow the's two more a-helpin' on him. Wal, if that hain't a cur'us freak o' human natur!"

The Canadian was interested only so far as to brush away the busy little workers with a mischievous sweep of his hat.

"Consarn it all, Joe!" Bart drawled, in a tone of mild indignation, while the same expression slightly clouded the habitual good humor of his countenance. "What d'ye want to go an' spile their fun an' mine for?"

"Oh, dey was work too hard for hant dat was on de taown," the Canadian answered, with a laugh, "an' dey want gat ready for Fourt' July to-morry."

"I guess Fourth of July won't do them no more

good 'an it will me," said Bart sadly. "Ho hum! I wisht I could go to the village to-morrer, an' git some gingerbread an' spreuce beer as I use to, an' hear the band play an' the cannon a-bangin'. But I s'pose I can't. I hain't got no money, an' they won't let us go, nuther."

Bart rubbed his frowsy poll with the stump of his left wrist.

"It bes' was you can't go, Baht, for prob'ly if you was you'll gat de res' of you han' bus' off, an' you'll can't spare great many more of it."

Bart slowly regarded the stump as if counting the cost before he answered.

"I do' know as 't would make much odds ef 't was my head."

"It was bes' one you'll gat. It bes' was you'll save it."

"I don't see why you don't set 'em to grindin' up their scy's," Mrs. Warden said to her husband. "They might jest as well commence to mow to-morrer."

"Oh, I guess I won't hev 'em, not on the Fourth," he answered apologetically.

"Wal, I would!" she answered spitefully. "What's a lot of porpers got to do with the Fourth of July? They'll eat jest as much the Fourth as any day, an' they'd ortu be airnin' the' victuals. See the louts a-loafin' raoun' an' the sun not nigh daown! I wish't I was a man!"

"You'd ought to ben!" Abel Warden said.
"You'd make things gee, Sairy Ann."

Mrs. Warden put both hands to the knot of sandy hair that adorned the top of her head like a wisp of dried corn-silk, and readjusted her imitation tortoise-shell comb. Her eyes again overran the group till they settled upon a young woman of such tall and masculine form that she might have been taken for a man masquerading in female attire as uncouth and as ill-fitting as male hands would be apt to produce.

"You, Hanner," said Mrs. Warden, raising her voice to a tone as imperative as she dared exert against one of whom she stood in wholesome fear, "you might be a-weedin' them onions in the cool o' the day!"

"Law, Sairy Ann," Hannah answered, intent upon balancing a pitchfork on her forefinger and plunging about with awkward strides to preserve its equilibrium, "them was wed afore you was up this mornin'!"

"Honh!" Mrs. Warden sniffed; and then added, "Wal, t' other gard'n sass?"

"All wed, clean as a whistle," Hannah responded airily, charging across the yard in pursuit of the slanted fork, which she recovered just in time to prevent its falling upon a ten-year-old boy and his younger sister, who sat quietly playing at building houses of the chips.

"Gaw! I did n't go to hurt ye!" cried Hannah, leaning upon her fork and kindly regarding the pretty faces that were upturned to hers, while she put behind her ears the straight black hair cut square about her neck.

Mrs. Warden's attention was drawn to the children, and she swooped down upon them as an easy prey.

"You git up aout of that dirt, you young uns!" she cried, advancing upon them with a threatening gesture.

Hannah faced about and put herself between the mistress of the poorhouse and the children.

"You let 'em alone, Sairy Ann!" she said, with a decided tone in her drawling voice. "They hain't a-doin' no hurt. No, you don't!" she screamed, as Mrs. Warden tried to dodge past her. Then, speaking over her shoulder to the children, "Tommy, you an' Janey'd better go an' set on the woodpile an' hear Joe and Bart tell abaout the Fourth."

"If I was a man," cried Mrs. Warden, her voice trembling with anger, "I'd hosswhip you, Hanner Bates, till ye knowed your place an' kep' it!"

"Gaw! You'd hafter be a bigger man 'an there is in these diggin's," said Hannah, smiling down upon her with exasperating good humor. "You'd better go 'long into the haouse an' le' me ta' care o' the young uns."

"I'm goin' to see the selec'men an' have 'em put

you aout to work somewheres, fer I won't stan' your imperdence no longer. An' them brats is goin' to be put aout, too! I won't bother with 'em!" cried Mrs. Warden, retiring, consumed with impotent wrath.

"That would be drefful!" Hannah called after her sarcastically. "Don't I wish they would! Land knows I hain't hankerin' to stay here!"

"Sho, Sairy Ann, we could n't spare Hanner!" said Abel Warden, in an undertone to his wife, as she passed him. "She's wuth any two of the men."

"A nice man you be, to set an' see your wife sassed by that critter!" she retorted, and went to the farthest corner of the kitchen to nurse her wrath in sullen silence.

The children seated themselves on the lower log of the woodpile, and presently forgot their interrupted play in listening to the discourse of their elders concerning the glories of the Fourth.

"Dey goin' start de cannon in de morny an' noon an' evelin'," said Joe, "an' play on de ban' all de tam 'cep' w'en dey heat dey dinny, an' L'yer Sharp read de Declopence Indoration."

"Declaration o' Independence, you!" prompted Israel Hard, a dried-up veteran of the War of 1812.

"Yas, dat was what Ah'll said," said Joe, complacently. "In de evelin'," he continued, "dey

goin' have fire-rocker an' too-numery-fo-menshin. Ah don' know what kan' o' firework dat was, but dat what Ah hear read on de paper. Yas, seh, too-numery-fo-menshin."

"Some sort of fizzlin' carlecues of fire, red, white an' blue," said Bart. "I seen 'em onct when I went to Fourth o' July."

"Oh, don't you wish they 'd let us go, Janey?" asked Tommy. Janey assented with emphatic nods, settling herself comfortably to further listening, after a glance toward the door to assure herself of no interruption from that quarter.

"Pa an' ma took me onct, when I was little an' you wa'n't only a baby. Mebbe we 'd both go now if they was alive."

"You don't s'pose they 'll let us go?" She jerked her head sidewise toward the house.

Tommy shook his head in hopeless negation.

"Say," Janey whispered eagerly, "you ask Joe an' Bart to ask Uncle Isril if he don't s'pose they 'll let us all go?" The children were too much in awe of the veteran, who seemed to them to belong to an age so remote that he could have no sympathy with the present, yet he was an authority whose judgment would be final.

Tommy twitched the frayed bottom of Joe's trousers to engage his attention, and whispered loudly to him, "You ask Uncle Isril if he don't s'pose Mis' Warden 'll let us go to-morrer?"

"You bet dey ant let you go. Prob'ly dey set all us hayin' to-morry, ant it, Onc' Islary?"

The old man grunted in a dry, cracked voice, "I'll be shot if I work hayin' Fourth o' July fer nob'dy! They won't let us go down there, day ner night; but I won't work. Ef I hed my pension, as I'd ortu hev, I'd be there all day; an' they'd ortu hev me to fire their cannon. Them fools 'll forgit to thum the vent, an' some on 'em 'll git blowed higher 'n a kite."

"They never let us have no fun!" Bart sighed. "It's nothin' but work an' chore an' git jawed to pay for it."

"Oh dear!" Janey almost sobbed. "They might let us go jest onct! We never go nowhere but to fun'ral's."

"Don't you cry," Tommy whispered, "or she 'll come aout an' shake you;" and the child choked back the rising tears.

"Ah tol' you what it was, seh," Joe said, breaking his meditative silence. "If Ah 'll only gat some podder, Ah can mek Fourt' of July raght here." In answer to their inquiring stares he explained. "Ah can bore hole in dem ellum chunk we can't split, an' put in de podder an' touch it an' blow it.—*boom, boom, boom*, lak ol' tunder! But Ah 'll ant gat de podder an' de slow-match for touch it."

"The' 's a big horn in the kitchen chuck full, 'at

he got tu shoot crows las' spring," Hannah suggested, in a gusty whisper.

"The' 's jes' thirteen of the chunks," the veteran declared, after twice counting over the obdurate elm logs with his staff. "They 'd make a reg'lar ol'-fashioned s'lute. Ef ye hed some saltpetre, I could make ye some slow-matches, Jozeff. Jest take an' soak some paper in saltpetre an' dry it, an' it 's a com-plete slow-match. That 's haow they make port-fires."

"The' 's some saltpetre in the butt'ry 'at Abel got for the sick caow," Hannah whispered again, drawing near the group of patriotic conspirators, "an' I can hook that an' the paowder for ye."

"Hanner, you was angels!" Joe exclaimed, in a burst of admiration. "If you help me," he continued, waving a hand toward Hannah and Bart, "we gat up 'fore hairly in de morny an' bore de hole, an' to-naght we mek de plaug all ready for drove in. Onc' Islary can mek de match, an' w'en hol' man an' hol' hwomans gone to Fourt' July in de day we load our gaun, an' in de evelin', w'en dey gone to see some more fun, we had nudder fun here — *boom*, hurrah for hurrah!"

Hannah brought the auger from the woodshed, and the available jack-knives of the party were employed in whittling plugs to fit the required bore, which was accomplished without discovery.

In the earliest light of the summer morning Joe

and Hannah began their labors, she boring the elm chunks, pouring in the charge of powder, and driving home each of the plugs with a single, well-directed blow of the beetle, the sound of which did not disturb the slumbers of Abel Warden and his wife.

"Ah 'll he'p you end up de chonk," Joe whispered, as rising on his sound leg and sinking on his crooked and stiffened lame one, his dumpy figure bobbed along beside her towering form, to the last and largest prone section.

"Git away!" she answered, impatiently; but in the same guarded tone, "I wrastled t' others, an' I guess I c'n wrastle this one." Putting her strong hands to it, she reared the huge block on eird as easily as if it were cork, rather than solid elm.

She had given the auger the last turn, and was about to withdraw it with its load of chips, when Joe arrested her with a sharp whisper: "Hist! what dat nowse?"

There was the distinct sound of rapidly approaching hoof-beats from the direction of the village.

"Sho, ain't nothin', only somebody goin' hum 'at's been catousin' to the tarvern all night," Hannah whispered, after a moment's listening. "Le' 's finish up."

The pace of the early rider slackened as he drew near, and then unmistakably turned in at the gate.

"Ah tol' you he comin' here," Joe whispered, in

great alarm. "Run! Hid!" and they scurried behind the low woodpile.

They covertly watched the horseman dismount and knock loudly at the door. Then they heard him address Abel Warden, who came to the door rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"Mornin'!" The wide-awake voice of the messenger sounded oddly in the drowsiness of the early hour. "The s'lec'men says you may send Uncle Isril daown to the village to tend to firin' the canern. There hain't nobody else 'at understan's it only Cy Wingate, an' he'll be 'how-come-ye-so' 'fore ten o'clock an' bust the gun an' kill somebody."

Abel mumbled an objection unheard by the listeners.

"Wal," the messenger responded, with one foot in the stirrup, "the s'lec'men says so, an' you want to send the ol' man right along! They'll give him his breakfas' to the tarvern! Hurry him up!"

So saying, he mounted and departed with his elbows beating the air like the wings of a bird as the horse broke into a gallop that jounced out the words of the repeated injunction.

"Tunder!" said Joe, in an expletive whisper. "Dat was be funs for Onc' Islary, but what we goin' do for have it some match?"

"Gaw!" Hannah responded, cautiously becoming erect as Abel shut himself from the outer world

with a spiteful slam of the door. "I guess we can wet a piece of paper an' dry it. I'm glad the ol' feller's got a chance to ha' some fun. I wish 't them young uns was a-goin'. I feel the wust for them, the lunsome leetle creeturs."

"Oh, we'll goin' mek it fun for dem lee'l feller wid aour hwood'n gaun. Come le's we'll finish, 'fore de folks gat up on de haouse."

Their task was completed without further interruption, and Joe limped afield to drive home the cows, while Hannah silently entered the house and brought out saltpetre from the pantry.

The veteran came hammering down the stairs on stiff and rheumatic legs, which were moved to unwonted briskness by the importance of the service on which he was detailed. In honor of this trust he wore a clean shirt and a carefully preserved bell-crowned hat, all that he had in latter years to distinguish his holiday attire from his ordinary dress.

Presently he was on his way to the village, and not long afterward the children were awakened by the thunder of the four-pounder served by him, now the most important person in the throng of early risers. Cy Wingate, the disreputable hero lately returned from the Mexican War, was already too drunk for duty.

When the morning chores were done, Mr. and Mrs. Warden betook themselves to Highfield's grand centre of attraction. The mistress, on part-

ing, enjoined Hannah to keep watch of the old hen turkey and her young ones, while Abel suggested that she might give the poor folks a "leetle bigger dinner 'n common, an' a piece o' pie all raoun'." He also told Joe and Bart that "they might 'muse 'emselfs a-workin' up them chunks."

"We'll gat it all split off 'fore naght, prob'ly. You see if he ant," said Joe, confidently, with a covert wink at Hannah.

It seemed to Hannah that there was no place the turkey and her brood were so likely to stray to that day as a wooded pasture hillside that overlooked the village.

Thither she led Tommy and Janey, and there the three sat in the shade, listening to the playing of the band, the roar of the four-pounder, and the huzzas of the patriotic multitude. They watched the flaunting banners and drifting powder smoke till it was high time for Hannah to run home and get dinner.

In the afternoon the search for the turkey was continued in the same direction, while Joe and Bart, unconscious of the fitness of the day to such an act, for the time declared themselves independent of the Highfield poorhouse, and ran away to enjoy the festivities with a vigilant eye to the chances of detection by the Wardens.

An old acquaintance, whose means were commensurate with his benevolence, treated them to

their fill of gingerbread and spruce beer, and the truants went home at late "cow-time" with happy hearts.

The chores done, the master and mistress again departed to witness the closing splendors of the day, the fireworks.

When they were well out of the way, Joe primed his ordnance, laid the matches ready, and as the sun went down, limped along the line with a coal in the kitchen tongs, and fired one after another of the slow-matches. Then he retired precipitately to the cover of the wood-pile, where Hannah, Bart, and the children crouched in breathless ecstasy of trepidation.

The thirteen sputtering sparks crept along the matches like so many glow-worms, devouring the paper as they crawled along. As the first reached the powder, there was a spouting jet of fire, a deafening report, a crash of rent wood. Fragments were hurled against the house, the upturned milk-pails, the pans, and the woodpile.

Then in irregular succession came another and another report, till almost before the awed beholders could catch their breath, the last two logs went off together in a final burst of thunder.

In the brief silence that ensued, the plugs came raining down in an intermittent patter; and then the select audience lifted up their voices in an enthusiastic cheer.

The unaccountable uproar was heard at the village, and created wonder and alarm among the throng awaiting the display of fireworks.

David Butterworth, the first selectman, unhitched his horse, while his portly wife, who insisted on accompanying him, laboriously climbed into the wagon, and drove with all speed to the poorhouse, followed by many to whom this new point of interest offered greater attractions than did the regular exercises of the evening.

“What on airth’s the matter here?” the father of the town demanded, as he drew rein in the yard where stood the group of conspirators, who were contemplating the result of their work with great satisfaction. “Is the haouse blowed up? Is the’ anybody hurt?”

Joe hung his head. Bart skulked away. The children stared at the new-comers in innocent wonder. Hannah alone came boldly to the front.

Resting a foot comfortably on the hub of a wheel, grasping the rim with one brawny hand, and putting back her vexatious locks with the other, she said coolly, —

“Gaw! we was jest a-bustin’ them ellum chunks, Mr. Butterworth. Me an’ Joe an’ Bart, an’ part o’ the time Uncle Isril, he’s ben a-wheltin’ at ’em ever sence the snow went off, an’ never got half a dozen slabs off. An’ naow jest look at ’em, pooty nigh kindlin’-wood they be! It was all the Fourth

we could hev, for they would n't let us go nigh the doin's. An' I did want these young uns should hev a little fun."

"Wal, I do' know as the's any harm done," said Mr. Butterworth, running a critical eye over the shivered slabs, "but I guess you'd better ha' asked. Where d'ye get the paowder?"

"Who'd 'a' let us if we hed ast?" Hannah demanded. "It was taown paowder, Mr. Butterworth—some 'at we got tu shoot crows, an' it wa'n't wanted, an' we jes' took it for Fourth o' July. We're 'Mericans, if we be on the taown, an' I was jest sot on the young uns hevin' some fun."

"Don' you say a word, David," his wife whispered, nudging him persuasively with her elbow. "I don't blame 'em one 'mite, poor creeturs. Hain't them nice-lookin' childern? Hain't it too bad to hev 'em brung up in a poorhaouse? Say, David, le's take 'em daown to see the fireworks; an' why don' you let 'em all go?"

"Wal, I do' know, sca'cely," he pondered, with a deliberation becoming his high position. Then, coming to a conclusion that was irresistible when his wife's will led thereto, "Yes, I guess so! Say," he called out, suddenly, as if with a self-evolved inspiration, "if you folks want to go an' see the fireworks, go right along, an' you young uns climb right in behind. Hang on tight, naow."

Hannah rushed into the house, and presently

appeared in a gown more curiously and wonderfully made than the one of every-day wear. The knot of spectators, having heard of the important part she had played in the paupers' celebration, raised a lusty cheer for "Hanner Bates an' t' other Fourth o' Julyers."

"Ah tol' you, Baht," said Joe to his comrade, as they, as a rear guard, escorted her to the village, "M'sieu Butterworse was de bes' s'leckmans dey was all raoun', an Ah 'll goin' vote for it every tam twice on March meetin's, me."

"Say, David," Mrs. Butterworth whispered, after a long, backward survey of the happy little faces, still discernible in gathering twilight, "I believe we 'll take the two young uns right home with us after the fireworks is aout. They're too pooty to be in the poorhaouse, an' would be an ornamint to any fam'ly."

As their presence was authorized by that high dignitary, the first selectman, it formed no small part of the paupers' enjoyment of the evening to take a conspicuous place among the spectators and boldly brave the angry eyes of Mrs. Warden.

"Ah b'lieved," Joe remarked to his companions, after a backward look at her, "de hol' hwomans was be so mad, he ant see no funs of de fireworks, prob'ly. But ye wan' keep you heye peel, Baht, for see dat too-numery-fo-menshin wen he was touch off."

"Jest look at them porpers a-settin' right in the front row!" Mrs. Warden said with smothered indignation to her neighbor, Mrs. Brown. "They 'll be uppisher 'n ever naow, an' land knows they was bad 'nough afore, 'specially that Hanner!"

Then, prudently dropping her voice to a whisper, she added, "Ol' Butterworth ort to hev a guardeen sot over him, 'stead o' him bein' s'lec'man. But it's all her duin's. See her a-cuddlin' them Hartly brats. They won't git much cuddlin' from me when I git 'em home, I can tell ye."

But she never "got them home." Good Mrs. Butterworth kept them for many a day as safe as they were to-night under her motherly wing. Their exclamations of delight rang out unrestricted among the long-drawn "ohs" of the crowd when rockets shot skyward and burst into falling stars. And "oh" and still "oh" they sighed while fiery wheels burned in a whirl of many-colored flame, and marked the brilliant close of a Fourth of July never forgotten by them.

WHAT THE NOVEMBER WOODS GAVE

“WHY, mother, if to-morrow ain’t Thanksgivin’!” said Jacob Bennett, broaching the subject as if it had just occurred to him, though one might have known by the troubled expression of his kindly face and the furtive glances cast upon his companions that it had for some time been under silent consideration.

He was putting the finishing touches of keenness with a whetstone to an axe that he held on his knee, with the helve now under his left arm, now resting on the floor.

Looking at Jacob with indifferent interest, was a boy of fourteen years, who sat curved to a restful attitude with his feet on the round of the low, splint-bottomed chair, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hand, thankful that the labor of turning the grindstone was accomplished. He awaited with resignation the beginning of the next task, the nature of which was indicated by the axe that leaned against his chair, waiting its turn on the whetstone.

At one of the two windows which lighted the room, stooping a little, with her hands on its ledge, stood the middle-aged woman whom Jacob addressed. She was gazing abstractedly on the Novem-

ber landscape, whose cheerlessness was half disguised by the thin mask of the first snowfall.

"Why, so 't is Thanksgivin', father!" she exclaimed, her tone dissembling surprise more artfully than her face, which she did not yet venture to turn to him, for she knew there were tears on her cheeks. She could not restrain them as she contrasted the ample fare of bygone Thanksgivings with the inevitable meagreness of this coming one.

Since she and Jacob were married all their Thanksgivings had been spent in the homely comfort of the old place, as they always called their late home on the hundred-acre farm. Almost a year ago they were forced to give it up, because Jacob had signed the notes of a speculating friend whose promising ventures had at length miscarried.

House, farm, and stock went to pay another man's debts, and Jacob was left nearly penniless, on the verge of old age, with a wife as old, an invalid daughter, and a son scarcely old enough to earn his own living. It did not console him to know that Bentley was as poor as himself, nor did he hope much in Bentley's assurance, as the speculator set forth with unabated faith in quest of fresh fields, —

"Never you fear, Jacup, ol' man ; I 'll fix things all right yet."

Jacob bore his changed fortune patiently and set himself to earn what he could by day labor for the support of his family. He was faithfully aided by

his wife and their invalid daughter, who was cunning with her needle. More than by aught else he was cheered by the brave spirit with which they bore their misfortune.

His wife covertly wiped her cheeks with the corner of her apron and turned from the window, adding to her previous exclamation, "It sartainly is, an' I hain't got anythin' ready for 't, only some punkin pies."

"Wal, punkin pies is jest the thing for Thanksgiving'."

"Of course they be, but they kinder want somethin' to help 'em out, seems 's 'ough," and she thoughtfully stroked her brow with thumb and fingers, "an' we hain't got a thing provided, only pork an' potatoes."

"An' onions," Jacob suggested.

"Why," said the daughter, lifting her pale, patient face, lighted with a smile, from her sewing, "with pork fried as mother fries it, an' such potatoes as we've got, an' onions an' punkin pies, I do' know what better anybody need ask for. I wish everybody had as good, an' I'm sure we can be thankful with it an' for it."

"You're always thankful," said her mother, "Thankful by name an' thankful by nature. We named you well."

"I'd deserve it more if I c'd make these gethers look somehow," and she rocked back in her

easy chair and held her work at arm's length to examine it critically.

"Le' me see," and her mother took the work in her strong hands. "It looks nice an' even 's if you 'd counted every thread. I call it hahnsome, an' right as a trivet. But speakin' o' Thanksgivin', it kinder seems 's 'ough there 'd ought to be somethin' stuffed an' baked for the meat victuals."

"Why can't we have a turkey, same 's we used to?" asked the boy, without changing his position or diverting his gaze from his father's occupation.

"Turkeys costs money," said his father, "when you don't raise 'em."

"An' that we hain't done," said the mother, "ner yet a chicken, which I'm glad we hain't, for they 'd scratched up the hull garden, it bein' so close to the house. A garden 's wuth more 'n chickens to eat. Still I wish 't we had one for Thanksgivin'. But we 'll try to be thankful for what we 've got, as Thankful says."

"An' that 's consid'able, compared to what some 's got," Jacob said. "We 've got a good ruff over our heads, an' me an' Bub 's earnin' money 'nough to pay the rent on 't for six months to come. We chop an' put up our two cord a day. I tell you, Bub 's gettin' to be a master hand with his axe. An' now 'at he 's got a chance to do chores for his board an' go to school, he 's fixed complete for winter."

"An' Square Bascom says I c'n come home every Sunday!" cried Bub.

"An' I'm glad to get such lots of sewin'," said Thankful. "I can earn a dollar every week."

"An' we're all tol'able well;" but looking over at his daughter, the father supplemented his remark with, "that is, we hain't no wus."

"An' best of all is, we've got one 'nother," said his wife.

"That's so, Mahaly!" he said, fervently. "Wal, my little fall chicken," addressing the boy as he arose and laid the whetstone on the crowded mantelpiece, "if mother's got our dinner put up, we'll be off."

The tin dinner-pail was ready at hand, and shouldering their axes, the father and son trudged across the fields, making a new brown path through the sprinkled whiteness.

"I'm afraid father misses his old-fashioned Thanksgiving dinner turribly!" Mahala Bennett sighed, as she watched the figures lessening on the powdered fields, and the dun streak lengthening behind them.

"No, he don't, mother," Thankful protested, "only for you an' me. I know by the looks of his face that was all he was thinkin' of. When a body's disappointed on their own account, they're apt to look cross; but father only looked sorry, and tried not to show it."

"Well, if he don't mind it, we won't. But I did use to enj'y fixin' things an' havin' our friends come. Hey, ho, hum! It seems sometimes as if our friends had gone with the turkeys."

"Oh, no, mother. They give us work, an' that's the best thing they could do for us. But if they all forsook us, we've got one 'nother, as you just said."

"So we have, dear heart; an' whilst we have, we can't be thankful enough."

Mahala Bennett took her needles and two balls of yarn, one of blue, the other of white, and drawing a chair near her daughter's, began "setting up" a striped mitten.

"I'm thankful there's some folks sensible enough to 'preciate good ol'-fashioned yarn mittens," she remarked, as she looped the double blue yarn on a needle with her finger. "Miller, down to the Holler, says he c'n sell all I c'n knit for a month, an' three pair a week ain't no great stent."

The bracing air, tempered by unclouded sunlight, stirred the blood of the man and boy alike with healthful vigor as they trudged across the fields and entered the woods. There shadows laced the forest floor with intricate patterns of blue where the snow lay inch deep on the fallen leaves, and with patches of deeper dun beneath the sheltering tents of the hemlocks. Every brown, outstretched twig, every tiny, close-wrapped bud, every

“sprangly” bloom of witch-hazel had its coping and cap of pearl, gleaming in sunlight or blue in shadow, and the ranks of corded wood were roofed with it.

The new covering was already marked with the tracks of scampering squirrels, the broad pads of hares, the pronged print of the partridge’s devious course, the dainty seam of woodmice paths. Bearing straight onward among them went the sharply defined footprints of a fox, as if he had been impelled by a more definite purpose than the other woodfolk.

Birds gave audible proof that they were astir and alert now. A party of jays screamed in discordant unison, chickadees and nuthatches called and piped, a woodpecker hammered industriously for his hard-earned breakfast, a partridge went booming away like a gray rocket with a trail of snow cloud sinking softly and silently behind his noisy course, a red squirrel jeered at the two intruders, and sent down upon them a sudden but brief snow shower from the hemlock branch on which he scampered.

The boy’s ears and eyes were alert for all sounds and sights. Before he delivered the first axe-stroke upon the boll of a great basswood his attention was attracted by a strange track that ended at its foot.

“O father!” he cried. “What kind of a track’s this? It looks just like a little teenty-tawnty boy’s bare foot.”

Jacob came around from the other side, and after a brief inspection, followed by a careful look up the tree, answered:—

“Why, Ikey, it’s a coon, an’ he’s laid up for the winter in this here tree. See, it’s holler,” and he struck his axe-head smartly on the trunk, which gave forth a dull, hollow sound.

“An’ there’s the hole up there ’at he went in. Now, we’ll just have his pelt nailed up on the woodshed door. I should n’t wonder if it was pretty nigh prime, for it’s had three r’s to get so in.”

“How do you mean, father?” Isaac asked.

“Why, they say fur’s good in ev’ry month that’s got an r in it, but it ain’t, not in September nor scacely in October, an’ it begins to git faded in April, some kinds does. But now it’s most December, an’—an’ we’ll just go for the feller, seein’ ’at we’re goin’ to git down half a cord o’ wood at the same lick! Look out sharp at the hole when the tree comes down, for like’s not he’ll cut an’ run. We’ll fall it right in here where it’s all clear.”

So saying he drove his axe to the eye in the soft wood, while Isaac with right good will delivered his less effective strokes on the other side. When Jacob had driven his kerf a little beyond the decayed centre, and paved the ground about him with broad chips almost as white as the snow, he heaved a restful sigh and went around to the other side.

“Now, Ikey, you just stan’ off out there, an’ keep

your eye on the hole, the minute the tree falls, an' if he offers to come out 'fore I get there, whack him on the head."

Jacob spat upon his hands and resumed his chopping, expiring with each blow a gasping "hah" that seemed to double its force, and Isaac took his post, with eyes fixed on the trunk where the first branches stretched abroad.

Now the great tree shivered at every stroke, then tottered on its sapped foundations, and went down with an accelerated sweep and a final crashing boom.

In the succeeding moment of silence, the raccoon, so suddenly awakened from the comfortable winter's nap into which he had just fallen, protruded his black and gray head from the hole, and barely dodging the blow that Isaac aimed at him, came scrambling out with more speed than his short legs would seem to warrant. A surer blow from the more deliberate hand of Jacob prevented his escape.

With a shout of triumph at the unexpected sight, Isaac lifted the limp form by the hind leg and heaved it across the fallen trunk.

"Sakes alive, father, he's as heavy as a pig. You just heft him."

"Well, he is a good one. Fifteen pounds or upwards," said Jacob, after careful and deliberate hand-weighing. "An' just feel o' the fur! As thick as wool. I reckon his pelt'll fetch half a

dollar, an' you shall have it all. Now le' 's skin him 'fore he gets cold."

So, sitting astride the log, Isaac held the legs while his father ripped and carefully stripped the warm coat from its thick lining of fat.

"It looks good enough to eat," said the boy, when the skinned carcass was laid along the trunk. "Ain't coons good to eat?"

"Some folks does eat 'em, an' allows they 're as good as roast pig."

"Say, father, why can't we have it for Thanksgiving?"

The father shook his head.

"Sho, Bub, your mother would n't touch it. She spleens agin all wild meat ever sence your Uncle Isaac blowed off his fingers bustin' a gun a-shootin' a pa'tridge. I don't b'lieve she'd cook it, to say nothin' of eatin' it."

"It looks just as good as a pig, an' I don't see why it ain't," persisted Isaac, with wistful eyes upon the game. Then inspired by a naughty thought, he said, "Say, father, why can't we tell mother it is a pig?"

"Sho, Bub, that 'ould be lyin'," said his father in mild reproof, speculatively regarding the raccoon and slowly whetting his knife upon his boot. Then he drew the carcass to him and began to dress it. Having neatly performed this, he cut off the feet and long, bony tail.

"But," he said at last, smiling quizzically on the

boy, who curiously watched his movements, "I do' know as we're obliged to tell a body exactly what it is. We'll carry it home an' see. Now we'll go down to the brook an' wash our hands, an' then we'll go to work."

As Isaac dabbled in the clear, cold water, his wandering glances caught the gleam of scarlet far up the brook; and he presently returned from a tour of investigation with several clusters of bright red berries.

"Cramb'ries," he exclaimed, "and there's snags of 'em."

"Good," said his father. "They make just as good sass as low-bush cramb'ries, only seedier. We'll carry home some on 'em, an' they'll go prime with our roast pig or four-legged turkey or whatever it is. An' now le's get to choppin', for we've got to put up our two cord afore night."

This they accomplished, and at nightfall bore homeward their forest trophy, over fields that a day of sunshine had made brown again.

"There, mother, see what we fetched you," cried Jacob, holding up his prize before his wife.

"Where in the livin' earth did you git that pig, Jacup? It is a pig, ain't it?" she asked, scanning it with admiring eyes and poking its fat ribs with a cautious forefinger.

"It was give to me, an' you ain't to ask no questions," he answered.

“How come they to skin it? I do’ know as I ever see a pig skinned an’ the feet cut off, but it does look real nice.”

“You mustn’t look a gift hoss in the mouth, Mahaly. Mebby they wanted the skin an’ mebby that’s their way o’ dressin’ ’em. Just look o’ the cramb’ries Bub’s fetched. He found ’em in the woods; an’ ain’t they nice ones?” While the attention of the mother and daughter was diverted to the birch-bark basket of berries, he, with some qualms of conscience, bore his prize to the cellar and then hastened out-of-doors to secrete the tell-tale peltry.

As the next afternoon advanced, the little kitchen was filled with a savory odor of baking meat and boiling onions that, whenever the door was opened, escaped abroad in appetizing whiffs that made Isaac’s mouth water and often impelled him to forsake his outdoor pastime and run in to note the progress of the feast’s preparation.

The old clock never before ticked off the seconds so deliberately, and its hands never lagged along their circular path so slowly as on this day. But at last the hour hand arrived at the figure two, the minute hand again reached twelve, the long, purring note of preparation sounded. As the second hour was struck, the little family gathered around the bountiful board, and waited with bowed heads while the father devoutly thanked the Giver of all blessings.

"Now, mother, what part of the — ah — critter will you try?" Jacob asked, as he skillfully carved the inviting roast.

"A leetle of the brownest, please, Jacup, an' not but a mite. I've been over it so much, I don't seem to hanker after it."

No one but Jacob noticed that she tasted it cautiously and experimentally. His fears were soon relieved by seeing that her appetite grew with what it fed upon, and were quite dispelled when she permitted him to help her again.

When the dessert of pumpkin pie was being served, Jacob beamed a complacent smile upon his family and said: —

"Now 'at we 've eat our Thanksgivin' meat, I'm goin' to make bold to ask you one an' all if it wa'n't good?"

With one voice they assented.

"An' now, not to be desaitful, I'm a-goin' to tell you what you 've been eatin' of."

"You need n't tell me, Jacup," said his wife, shaking with laughter. "It was 'coon!"

"How on airth did you know, Mahaly?"

"Why, I s'mised at first you was a-foolin', an' when I see a great long black and white hair into the meat, I knew it wa'n't no pig that it ever growed on; and when I come to find the ring-tailed skin under a barrel in the woodshed, it was all plain."

“An’ you went right on an’ cooked it an’ eat of it just to please me and the children. Wal, I say for it, Mahaly Bennett, you be a good woman!”

She poured out a second cup of tea, cleared her throat and began with hesitating words: —

“I kind of forgot — an’ — kind of hated to tell you what Mis’ Barker said yesterday, Jacup.”

He looked at her inquiringly, with a piece of pumpkin pie within an inch of his open mouth.

“Mis’ Barker’s cousin ’at has been out West, she see Abram Bently; an’ the land he bought out there ten year ago for most nothin’ has riz so on account of a big town growin’ up ’long side of it, ’at it’s made him rich.”

“You don’t say!” Jacob laid down his knife. “Well, I’m glad on’t for his sake an’ for ourn. He ’ll come back an’ pay up ev’ry cent he owes if he’s able.”

“That’s what she says he says he ’ll do; but I shall believe it when I see it,” and she shook her head. “It’s hard paying for a dead horse.”

“He ’ll do it, Mahaly,” said Jacob, loyal to his absent friend. “He sartainly will if he’s able. O Mahaly, it ’most takes my breath away to think of livin’ at the ol’ place again. I can finish my dinner with a thankfuller heart just for the hope of it.”

A HOUSEWIFE'S CALENDAR

"OH dear me, suz! If that hain't too bad!" Mrs. Betsey Blake cried in almost tearful vexation, as she stepped backward from the stove, and with a rueful face regarded a thin stream of water trickling from a crack low down on the side of the wash boiler and sputtering into a cloud of steam on the hot stove. "John!" she called, in a voice full of trouble, "the b'iler 's leakin' like mad, an' it looks just as if nothin' short of a tinker could stop it."

Her husband came into the kitchen from the woodshed at a leisurely pace, and with an air of confidence in his ability to cope with any number of leaky boilers. But as he examined the irregular fissure his face took on a puzzled and then a more serious expression.

"Maybe you might stick a rag into it," he suggested.

"No, not in such a shaped hole as that," she said decisively, and began dipping the water out into a pail. "You've got to take it to the village and have it soddered, an' that 's all there is about it. It'll just spoil the day, so I can't wash afore to-morrow, an' that'll put back my Thanksgivin' work. Hain't it too bad? Dear me, I most wish

we had n't asked father an' mother an' Abigail to come."

"Well, I'm sorry it's happened so, but never mind. You'll fetch things round all right; you gen'ally do," said he, so confidently that her spirits rose above the present disappointment.

"I can do some of to-morrow's work to-day, an' be so much ahead," she said, and before he was on his way to the village, she had half a pumpkin pared and stewing in the place of the boiler.

Next morning the mended boiler was reinstated; by noon the delayed washing was completed, and Betsey Blake looked out complacently from her belated dinner upon the long array of spotless clothes fluttering from the swaying line, like triumphant banners. In the afternoon a part of the ironing was done, and next morning she arose refreshed, and with a sense of relief from one great labor of the week.

"There," she exclaimed, sitting down for a moment's rest, after clearing the breakfast table, washing the dishes and sweeping the kitchen. "Thank goodness, washin' day is over and some o' the ironin' done, an' now it's only Tuesday, with two whole days afore Thanksgivin' to git good and ready in."

"Hey? What?" John asked, abstractedly, with his eyes on the columns of the last paper, absorbed in an editorial on the Philippines.

"Two more days afore Thanksgivin'," Betsey repeated.

"Why, yes, so there is," said he, looking up at the clock, as if for confirmation. "I was kind o' thinkin' this was Wednesday, but could n't make it seem just right."

"Of course it's Tuesday, for I washed yesterday," said she, with convincing assurance. "And now I'm goin' to make my cramb'ry sass an' my mince an' apple pies. I shall leave my punkin pies for to-morrow, for I want them fresh. This arternoon you'd better kill the turkey and dress him so't he'll have a good long spell to hang; they're heaps better so 'n they be to fly into the oven. And then to-morrow you can git Silas an' go arter your load o' wood; mebby you can git two."

As John Blake drove his lumber wagon along the road the next morning on his way to the wood lot he noticed that an indolent atmosphere seemed to pervade the few farmhouses which he passed, but it only impressed him as a rather early sign of the coming holiday.

He found Silas Day cutting firewood at his door, looking somewhat surprised at his appearace, and more so at the request to go to the woods.

"Why, yes, I s'pose I can go an' help you a spell," he answered, "arter I cut Phebe a speck more wood; she'll want consid'able to-day."

"Yes, gettin' ready so for Thanksgivin'. Betsey is, too, busy as a bee in a tar barrel."

Presently they were jolting over the rough by-road, too much shaken for comfortable conversation until they came to a halt in the quiet of the bare November woods.

"I don't hardly see how you come to put off git-tin' your wood till to-day," said Silas, looking up through the netted branches at the climbing sun.

"Well, I had a lot of things to tend to, an' could n't get roun' to it. I s'pose I might ha' waited till arter Thanksgivin', but thought I might as well git it afore."

Silas stared at him and muttered, "Runnin' pretty clus to the wind, I should think."

After they had plied their axes awhile, John struck his into a log, and going to his coat drew a package from a pocket.

"I always did relish victuals in the woods, and so I fetched along some bread an' meat. Le' 's set down an' take a bite."

"Well, I can mos' always eat," Silas assented, as he took his allotted share and sat down beside his companion, munching the bread and meat and letting his eyes rove about as people are apt to do when eating out of doors. A company of chickadees were busily gathering their slender fare on a low branch before him, and on a higher one a red squirrel began rasping a butternut.

"Eatin' their Thanksgivin' dinner," Silas said, nodding at the little banqueters.

"Make 'em a tol'able long meal if they keep it up till to-morrow arternoon. Hush! What be they ringin' the meetin' house bell for?" John asked, excitedly, as the mellow tones of a church bell were wafted to their ears.

"Why, don't they always?" Silas asked, glaring curiously at his companion.

"Why, Silas, you know they don't never, only Sundays and Fast Days and Thanksgivin', except funerals, an' there ain't nobody dead, not as I know of."

"Look a here, John Blake," said Silas, "be you crazy or be you foolin'? You act all the time as if you was makin' b'lieve this wa'n't Thanksgivin' Day, sot by the Gov'nor an' bein' kep' by everybody but you an' I. Now, quit your nonsense an' le's hurry up, for I want to git home. We hain't got no turkey, but Phebe had three as neat chickens as ever you see all ready to go int' the oven when I come away, an' the childern's all goin' to be there, an' I want to be on hand, to rights."

John's face grew blank; his eyes stared, unseeing, into space.

"Good gracious Peter! If Betsey an' me hain't done it!" Then springing to his feet, "Hurry up! I should say! Most noon Thanksgivin' Day, Betsey's father an' mother an' sister a-comin', an'

the turkey a-hangin' up in the cellar if she's kep' a-dreamin' as long as I have. It all come o' that plaguey ol' wash b'iler springin' a leak Monday, so she could n't wash till Tuesday, an' we counted from that. Never mind the tarnal wood. Onhitch the ho'ses an' le's scoot."

Five minutes later the team was tearing down the road, the bounding wagon sending far and wide its thundering echoes that brought forth alarmed inmates from many a farmstead, while Silas hung on for dear life, as disjointed pleas and protests were jolted from him, all unheeded by the reckless driver.

Deacon Adams in his Sunday suit, less the coat, was standing in the midst of his Sunday-dressed household, with an open letter in his hand and disappointment on his face that was repeated in various degrees on the faces of the family. Hearing the unwonted din, the deacon rushed forth to ascertain the cause.

"Stop! Stop! Hold on!" he cried running out into the road, and John, impatient of delay, drew rein.

"What on this livin' airth, John, is the matter? Is somebody sick or have you b'en takin' more'n you'd ought to?"

"No, there hain't nobody sick, and I hain't b'en a-drinkin'," said John, and rapidly set forth the awkward situation.

"You wait a minute, and I'll fix you up right as a trivet," said the deacon, still restraining his impatient neighbor. "I'll lend you a turkey, all roasted and ready to go ont' the table. I'd live-ser 'n not, an' so would Mis' Adams. You see, we invited my brother Iry and all his folks, and we'd got two roustin' big turkeys int' the oven and half roasted when there come a letter from 'em sayin' how Iry'd up an broke his leg and they would n't none of 'em come. I don't want to be eatin' cold turkey for a week arter Thanksgivin', and it's providential 'at yourn missed fire."

Suitable provision was made for the safe transportation of the hot turkey the short distance, and John Blake went his way with it, relieved in spirit.

Meanwhile Betsey had spent half the forenoon leisurely preparing for the morrow's festivity, glad to be unembarrassed by the presence of men folks and uninterrupted by any visitors until a timid rap called her to the door, and she opened it to Silas Day's little daughter.

"Why, Mandy, is this you? Is there anything the matter to your house?" Betsey asked, in evident surprise.

"No, ma'am — yes, ma'am, I mean, some matter," Mandy stammered. "The cat got int' the buttry an' eat up a whole punkin pie, all but the crust, an' ma wants to know if you can't lend her one, 'cause there ain't enough left to go round."

"A punkin pie? Come in and set down. Why, I hain't got none baked. Wa'n't goin' to till this arternoon. Your ma can have one to-morrow, an' I s'pose that's what she wants it for."

Mandy stared at her, round-eyed and open-mouthed. "No, ma'am, she wants it to-day."

"Well, she can't have it of me afore night. How comes it you hain't to school?"

"The' hain't no school to-day."

"Hain't no school? Is the schoolma'an sick?"

"No, ma'am; she went home to Thanksgivin'."

"What! Lose two whole days for Thanksgivin'? That's ridic'lous," Mrs. Blake declared, with emphasis.

"Why, no; she's comin' back to-night or in the mornin'."

"An' not keep Thanksgivin' in her own home? That's ridic'louser."

"Why, Mis' Blake, she's keepin' it to-day at her own home," said Mandy, staring with still wider eyes at her hostess. "This is Thanksgivin' Day!"

"It hain't!" Mrs. Blake made this assertion stoutly, but she was beginning to feel sickening qualms of doubt.

"It sartain is, Mis' Blake, 'cause ma's roastin' three chickens, an' we're all to home, and oh, my, you'd ought to smell it to Deacon Adamses as I come by."

“My land o’ goodness!” the poor woman gasped, sinking into a chair in complete collapse, as the mistake became undeniably evident. “I’ve skipped a day, I do b’lieve. It all come o’ that mis’able b’iler leakin’ so’t I could n’t wash Monday.”

The rumble of wheels caught her ear. She cast an appalled glance out of the window. “And there, if there hain’t mother an’ father an’ Abigail a-drivin’ up this minute, and the turkey not singed nor the stuffin’ made, nor a punkin pie made! Thank goodness ’t ain’t his folks! There’s mince and apples pies enough. Mandy, you git one o’ each kind and take ’em home — but what shall I do?”

She put on a brave face to mask her mortification, as she went out to meet her guests, whom she wished miles away, in spite of her longing to see them. But when she invited them into the unready house, and tried to make a joke of her mistake, and saw the look of disappointment steal over the faces of her sharp-set travelers, her feigned laughter broke into genuine sobs. Then John Blake suddenly appeared in the midst of the depressed group, bearing the borrowed turkey, which in the nick of time made a joke of the mistake and turned fasting to feasting.

THE GOODWIN SPRING

"Ho, hum! I hain't wuth a row o' pins," said Jerry Goodwin, coming in at the open kitchen door with short, rheumatic steps, and the backs of his begrimed hands pressed against his loins, the crooked fingers spread wide apart in abhorrence of gritty contact with each other.

He went over to the backless lounge that was spread with a checkered blue and brown blanket and pillowed with a cushion covered with calico of a newer pattern than that of the valance. After slowly lowering himself till he had no further control of his stiff joints, he let himself fall in a sitting position and crossed his wrists over his knees so that he might still keep his hands and fingers apart. "Poo, hoo!" he sighed, and bewailed the decline of his strength. "No, sir, mother, I hain't wuth a jew's-harp. I can't stan' nothin'."

He looked at the naked old clock whose wooden wheels were exposed to curious eyes and clogging dust, and whose deliberate pendulum and slow weights swung and dangled in open space.

"Ha' past nine," he said. "I hain't ben aout in the garden on'y an haour a pullin' weeds an' a

wras'lin' 'raound wi' my hoe, an' a killin' bugs, an' I'm tireder 'n a dawg, an' you can't see where I ben. No, I hain't goo' for nothin'."

"Sho! Yis you be, tew," his wife said in as cheerful a tone as her hoarse, toothless voice could assume, and giving so little heed to his complaint, that her intent, spectacled eyes were not taken from the peas that she was picking over after shell-ing. "The' hain't no forarder garden 'an aourn no-where, an' I do' know who 's tended it if you hain't. I'll be baound the' hain't nob'dy got sech marrer-fats. Shah! I've spilt one. There 't is right over there by your left heel, no, your right one. There, you've squshed it! Wal, nev' mind, I guess the' 'll be 'nough 'thaout it, but I du hate tu see good vict-uals wasted. Yis, you be goo' for suthin'. The' 's more days' works in ye naow 'n the' is in half these 'ere snipper-snapper young fellers."

"A gardin don't 'maount tu nothin'," he said, gathering the fragments of the crushed pea and nursing them in his palm. "Ju' look o' the corn! Ju' look o' the 'taters! Weeds a-smotherin' on 'em. An' I do' know haow on airth I'm a goin' tu git the hayin' done. I tell ye, it hain't no use o' me a wrastlin' wi' farmin' no longer. It's a 'tarnal hard farm tu git a livin' aouten on for a young man, an' I hain't young nor got no means tu hire work done. We might jes' 's well sell aout, 'Senath, or let it tu halves."

“Wal, we won’t never let it,” his wife said decidedly, as she took up the basin of peas and the pail of pods and bustled briskly across to the sink. “I won’t never set in the corner an’ see other folks duin’ wi’ my things, an’ this ruff hain’t big enough to kiver tew fam’lies. The’ hain’t no ruff big enough.”

“Wal, I s’pus so, an’ I cal’late we ’ll haffter sell aout. We *could* live long o’ brother Joel’s darter over tu Adams. Her man’s tol’ me time an’ agin ’at we ’d be more’n welcome.”

“An’ be laid on the shelf like a cracked platter ’at hain’t trusty tu be used an’ jes’ stays there an’ gethers dust. An’ you ’ve allus felt as if you wanted tu walk your own floor boards no matter if they be short an’ narrer, an’ I do’ know but I sh’ld feel lunsome, myself.” As she spoke Asenath Goodwin looked from the door at her flower-bed close to the little brown house, already brave with pinks, sweet peas, and “sturtions” in bloom. “Haow nice my mornin’ glories be comin’ on sence you watered ’em so good! Ther’ ’s lots o’ life fer ev’ything in that ’ere spring water.”

“I never c’ld see what possessed father tu pitch on sech a mis’able right o’ land when he hed the hul taown to pick aout on ef it wa’n’t fer that spring. He did hev jedgement on that p’int, fer the’ hain’t another sech spring nowheres. I sh’ld hate dreffly tu part with ’t.”

“I know ye would, it’s so full o’ life when it’s fresh brought.” As she spoke she poured a dipper of the clear spring water into the basin of peas, swashing them about with her hand and skimming off the imperfect ones that floated upon the surface. “It don’t seem as ’ough I c’ld ever relish no other water. I’ve dranked it by spells ever sence I was a leetle gal an’ fust begun a-goin’ tu school an’ we use’ tu stop an’ drink aout on’t ev’y mornin’ an’ night an’ come up here noons tu eat aour dinner when it was pleasant. Land! I c’n see jest haow my face use’ tu look in ’t when I knelt daown an’ dranked aout on ’t when I was a leetle snip of a gal, an’ when I got growed ’most up, my cheeks a-wrinklin’ up an’ a-smoothin’ aout wi’ the ripple an’ my teeth a-mixin’ up wi’ the white pebbles in the bottom an’ my cheeks an’ hair wi’ the shadders o’ the red an’ yaller leaves so ’s ’t I could n’t tell which from t’ other. Land, they don’t look much as they did then! The wrinkles stays all the time, an’ the teeth is perty nigh gone an’ the hair an’ the cheeks, they ’re shadders o’ dead beech leaves ’at ’s ben snowed on. Massy sakes! what a humbly ol’ critter I be!” She laughed with a pathetic attempt at mirthfulness and a disregard of lost youth as she glanced at her double in the unflattering looking-glass.

“No, no,” said Jerry in a comforting voice. “You look jes’ as well as ever you did, an’ ‘harn-

some is 'at harnsome does,' an' that means you ev'y time. So there!"

A flash of ruddy color shone through the dead leaf tint of the old wife's cheeks and her face brightened with a smile.

"You're jest a-talkin', father."

"It's gospel truth," said he. "The' can't nob'dy say but what you've done harnsome."

"Mebby I've tried tu du as nigh right as I knowed haow, but land knows, I've fell a good ways short on 't," she answered with a sigh; and then after a little silence said, "But that don't signify! I don't see haow we're a-goin' tu sell the place if we want tu. The' hain't nob'dy wants tu buy it, erless it's some o' them French, an' I can't stan' the idee o' them a-gabbin' an' a-swearin' an' a-dancin' in the haouse, like 's not in the square room where aour little Jerry was sick so long, an' makin' it all smell o' onions the hul endurin' time."

She cast a fond look around the neat room, the white-washed walls, the scoured wood-work and the spotless floor, then took a sniff of its cleanly odors of sound old unpainted pine and of fresh lime, and the faint savor of wholesome cooking mingled with wafts of tansy and old-fashioned pinks and camomile that came in through the open windows.

"I ben a studyin' on 't conside'able," said Jerry, "an' I kinder cal'lated we'd better see that Fitch feller an' hev him put it in his paper. Like 'nough

that 'ould fetch someb'dy 'at we 'd be willin' tu hev buy it."

"Like 'nough mebbly it would, an' it 'ould be someb'dy 'at 'ould 'preciate the spring. I shouldn't expect nothin' but what these creeturs 'ould let the hosses an' cattle trample an' rile it all up."

"I guess I 'll g'wup an' git a pail'l," Jerry said, overcoming the stiffness of his joints with a sudden effort and rising to his feet. He washed his hands at the sink with a liberal allowance of soft soap till cleaned of garden soil, and got the fingers into neighborliness with one another and himself, remarking of the water, "It suds julluck rain water." Taking the pail he hurried away to the spring, as if to forestall such desecration as his wife foretold.

A path worn hard and smooth between borders of knotgrass and plantain led to the famous spring that, beneath a great fern-crowned rock of red sandstone, bubbled and seethed like a boiling pot, into a pebbled basin rimmed with a rank growth of ferns and mint, that was scarcely parted where the water stole silently to widen into a little brook that went babbling merrily on its stony way to the river. A big bullfrog sat embowered on the brink winking in solemn contemplation, till Jerry stooped to fill the pail, then plunged in with a dissatisfied croak and jerked across the pool, disturbed and magnified by the ruffled water till he reappeared in proper person on the other side to regard the frequent in-

truder from a safer point of view. At the double splash of frog and pail, a score of minnows flashed like a flight of bronze and silver arrows, shot beneath the water and disappeared in the crevices of the rock. The old man set the filled pail on the flat stone where he stood and took repeated draughts from a birch-bark dipper that was always kept at the spring, following each draught with a satisfied sigh.

“The’ hain’t another sech a spring o’ water this side o’ Jeruslum,” and he replaced the dipper on the shelf of rock and looked down on the noiseless boil of the pool in the pride of ownership. “Cold ’nough in summer tu make your thrut ache, an’ warm as milk in winter, an’ ’nough on ’t tu water a thaousan’ yoke o’ oxen. A farm ’at ’s got sech water ort tu fetch suthin’ if it won’t raise white beans.”

He took up the pail, and with frequent shifts of it from hand to hand, stumped back to the house, where with fresh proof of its quality the praises of the spring were again sounded.

“It don’t seem ’s if I c’ld live where I could n’t git a holt o’ that ’ere spring water,” Asenath Goodwin said, drinking the last of it in her tumbler, as the two sat at the table after their comforting dinner.

“Wal, we can’t live on jest spring water, if it is the best the’ is.”

“I know that, an’ aour dinner hain’t ben all col’

water, nuther. Them peas an' pertaters is jes' 's good fer victuals as the spring water is fer water."

"So they be, cooked as you cook 'em," her husband said more cheerfully and with hearty good will.

"Then agin, think o' livin' where all the drinkin' water comes through pump logs a-losin' all its life, or wus still in lead pipe full o' p'isen, an' like 'nough comin' f'm a brook er a river 'at takes all the dumpin's of a village er tew."

"It fairly makes me dry tu hear ye talk, 'Senath," and Jerry poured out a tumblerful of the precious water and held it up to admire the purity of the liquid before drinking it.

As his wife deftly cleared the dinner away and Jerry settled himself on the old lounge for his customary after-dinner rest, she quietly remarked:—

"Like 'nough when you git up, father, you 'll feel like goin' tu see that 'ere printer feller." Receiving no reply she presently asked, "What price 'ould you put on the place if you was ast?"

"Not no price! I would n't part wi' that 'ere spring fer its weight in gold."

THE MOLE'S PATH

WHEN Hannah Wray was left alone, more than seventy years ago, by the death of her father, an active worker in the anti-slavery cause, it was not the least of her sorrows that she could not continue his work. The Wray house, so easily distinguishable by strangers and wayfarers because of its gambrel roof and the two tall Lombardy poplars that were its landmarks afar off, was no longer a frequented station of that dark thoroughfare that, unseen and often unsuspected, like the mole's path beneath the meadow turf, formed a network through our Northern States. Along its secret lines many dusky travelers passed in safety on their long journey through the Land of the Free to the liberty denied them in it.

Hannah was of too timid a nature to take a place in the aggressive ranks of the Abolitionists. She could not, even though the Spirit moved vehemently, bring herself to bear testimony in Friends' meeting among her own people. It was out of the question for a lone woman to harbor unknown men coming at all hours of the night. So she tried to content herself with subscribing to the state anti-slavery paper, with making her small contributions

to the cause, and with gathering donations of clothing for the fugitives in Canada West. Thither had gone, in accordance with his wishes, her father's entire wardrobe, shad-bellied brown coats, long drab waistcoats, and barn-door breeches, with underclothes made of free-labor goods, the broad-brimmed drab felt hat and honest home made foot-gear.

If Hannah had been one of the world's people instead of a self-controlled Quakeress, she would have confessed to being worried one fall morning, as she nervously folded, sealed carefully with a red wafer, and addressed a letter at her kitchen table, and going to the door, looked intently up the road. She was aware of being "considerably concerned" when the stretch of black thoroughfare, now frozen hard, revealed no sign of life nor of motion, between its borders of naked trees and dun grass, save a scurry of withered leaves, here and there, caught by a swoop of the November wind and tossed by it like a flock of frightened birds.

At the bend of the road stood the old Friends' meeting-house, gray and lonely beside its treeless yard of unmarked graves. The shade of anxiety clouding her placid face changed to an expression of quiet sadness as her eyes dwelt on the deserted building, and she wished that her father could be with her, if but for a moment, to advise her in her present strait.

"I say for it, it's strange what keeps Joseph

to-day of all days," she soliloquized, as was her habit like that of many who are much alone and crave the sound of a human voice. "Well, watching won't bring him any sooner."

She reëntered the kitchen and made pretense of busying herself with the impossibility of making it more neat and orderly. She set a waiting coffee pot a little farther back on the stove, mended the fire, and swept vigorously where the litter of the wood was supposed to have fallen. While she was going through the form of emptying this into the stove, the clear, melodious winding of a horn caught her ear above the clatter of dustpan and griddle.

Hastening to the door, she saw a man on horseback turning the bend by the meeting-house at a gallop. The sound of the postman's horn was pleasant to her ears, though it came perilously near being a tune. She watched the rider until he was within thirty rods of her, his eyes being curiously intent on some object above her. Then, going to the stove, she poured a steaming cup of coffee and was at the threshold with it when he drew rein before the broad stepping-stone.

"Here is thy coffee," she said, stepping out; "I'm afraid it ain't so good as common, thee is so late. What made thee?"

Joe Bagley drew the latest number of "The Voice of Freedom" from the right-hand saddle-bag and reached it toward her to exchange for his

accustomed stirrup cup, answering, explaining, and asking, continuously, as he did so : —

“ Oh, to’able, haow be you? Had tu stop an’ git a shoe sot. Say, Miss Wray, who you got stayin’ wi’ ye? See someb’dy peekin’ aout the gerrit winder. Looked kinder dark-complected.”

Hannah started back, the hand that held the proffered cup drew it toward her and she took her other hand from the pocket where her letter was. Joe’s pale gray eyes opened wider as he leaned over to his utmost balance for the fragrant cup, tantalizing his nostrils and palate. Her face at once regained its wonted calmness, and her voice was steady as she asked : —

“ Is n’t thee mistaken, Joseph? ”

“ I seen ’em jest as plain as I see you, Miss Wray, someb’dy peekin’ aout the gerrit winder. Did n’t you know there was someb’dy? ”

“ Hitch thy horse a minute an’ come in to drink thy coffee. I must speak to thee in private.” For she saw her nearest neighbor, quick-eared Betsey Lane, coming out of her house, and Betsey “ hated niggers, and ’ould lick ev’ry one on ’em an’ send ’em straight back tu where they come f’om.”

“ He don’t need no hitchin’, but I’m kinder late a’ready. Ol’ hoss is gittin’ bunged an’ slower ’n a snail; ” but the coffee and his curiosity were stronger than his sense of duty, and throwing his crippled right leg over the saddle pommel, he slid to

the ground and limped inside the door, which was closed carefully behind him. Just inside, he stopped, apparently appalled by the neatness of the room.

"Sit down and drink thy coffee," she said, setting a chair for him.

Without removing his close-fitting sealskin cap,—the coarse, black, shiny hair worn to the skin in spots,—or even untying the half oval lappets tied under the chin with two strings of black tape, he obeyed her and began sipping the coffee, while his eyes slowly ranged the spotless purity of the room, and returned to its no less immaculate mistress.

"I've got tu hev me a new hoss, the' hain't no tew ways 'baout it," he explained, perched on the edge of his chair with his feet crooked far under him, "but haow I'm goin' tu 's more 'n I know. Airnin's is desp't slow."

"Joseph Bagley," she said in her quiet voice, giving no heed to his words, but seating herself before him and looking straight into his wavering, colorless eyes so different from the clear blue of her own, "I think thee has a kind heart and that I can trust thee with a weighty secret."

"Yis, marm."

"What thee saw at the window is a poor hunted runaway woman. She and her child have been here since last First Day night. I heard yesterday that the slave hunters are close behind on her track.

They have handbills out describing her and her child, and they offer a hundred dollars for them."

"A hunderd dollars?" he burst out. "Gol, I'll bet that 's one o' them papers on the meetin'-'ouse door, as I come along."

"On the meeting-house? Oh," — Hannah's cheek flushed, "but never mind that, now. What I want of thee is to say nothing of what thee has seen to any one, — any one, mind."

"Yis, marm," Joe answered, and she went on: —

"James is a good tenant and does well by my farm, but I can't trust this to him, and I don't keep any horse that I can drive. Now, I want thee to take this letter to Aaron Varney just as quick as thee can and do thy business as thee goes along. Of course, thee must do that, but don't dally on the way nor stop anywhere to talk to any one, — as thee has with me," she added, smiling at the incongruity of her precept and example. "Now thee understands. Remember I depend on thee to help me. It would be dreadful to have these poor creatures taken back to slavery. I can't bear to think of it."

"No, marm, an' you 'd better tell the fool of a nigger to keep away f'm the winder."

"Please don't call these unfortunate colored people by that name, Joseph; it hurts me."

"Seems 's 'ough that was the name on 'em, — same 's we 're Yankees."

"Never mind, now. Thee 's not to mention

having seen any, and thee 'll get my letter to Aaron as soon as thee can. Now thee's finished thy coffee, put some doughnuts in thy pocket and go on."

Joe pocketed a generous supply of Hannah's delicately browned and puffy cakes, and with the letter in the breast pocket of his coat, he limped out to his horse.

"Farewell, Joseph, thee understands I am trusting thee greatly in this matter."

Hannah watched through a crack of the rush curtain until assured of the carrier's speedy passage by her inquisitive and dangerous neighbor. Then she climbed the stairs to the chambers and thence to the low-roofed attic where her charge was bestowed in a closet-like room behind the great chimney. Sliding aside the secret panel, she stooped low and entered the chamber of refuge where during her girlhood many a fugitive had found rest from his weary journeying. It was a place made almost holy to her in its defiance of unrighteous laws.

A dark negress with the scared, alert look of a hunted wild animal, sat on the low bed where a mulatto child lay quietly sleeping.

"Milly, thee poor foolish thing," Hannah began in a tone of mild reproach, "why will thee go to the window? The post-rider saw thee and it may bring us great trouble. Thee must be more careful. Thy Heavenly Father will help thee if thee trusts Him. But remember thee must help thyself and

thee must not be seen at the window. I'll bring thy dinner presently and then thee try to sleep, for it's likely thee'll have to ride a long way to-night, and thee must be ready to start at a moment's notice." She laid a gentle hand on the turbaned head as she spoke. The woman caught it in her hard palms, crying out : —

"De Lawd 'll sholy bless' yo', missus, whateber happens to we uns."

Closing the panel behind her, Hannah went down to the kitchen, and putting on her hood and drab shawl, she locked the door behind her and set forth for the performance of another duty. She walked briskly up the road, stirring the leaves to further flights before the north wind. In stately fashion a procession of crows was faring before the wind on their southward journey, and a grand progress of white clouds drifting against the sunlit sky.

That atrocious advertisement, displayed on the old meeting-house, sanctified by long-continued testimony against the sin of slavery, was an affront not to be endured. She mounted the broad, rough stone and stood a moment to read : —

"One Hundred Dollars' Reward for the Apprehension of my slave woman Milly and her girl. Said woman is 28, tall, very dark, with scar on left cheek. Girl light, 5 years old."

If they had put it on the door of a steeple-house whose hireling priest excused the crime, it would

have been fittingly placed, she thought, and her cheeks flushed with an anger for which her conscience condemned her. She snatched the paper from its fastening, tore it in small fragments and threw them to the winds. Then turning away she retraced her steps homeward.

The postman did not need to blow his horn for the notification of Betsey Lane, for she was already at her gate, her head hooded with her apron, her inquisitive eyes boring him at long range, her lips tremulous with questions as he slackened his pace and drew her paper from his pouch as he approached.

"Here's your 'Rutlan' Herald,' Mis' Lane."

"What was you a-stoppin' so long for at Hanner's? I've stood here a-waitin' for ye till I'm 'mos' froze."

"Gittin' a maouse aouten a trap," he answered. "Beats all haow feared women folks be of a leetle maouse."

"Has Hanner got comp'ny? See any black critters hengin' raoun' there? Thought I heerd a young un yellin' bloody murder, once yist'd'y."

"Why, yis, I did see a black cat lyin' 'n under the stove."

As Joe handed her the paper he dug his heels into his horse's flanks and made an unspellable sound with his tongue against his teeth.

"It took ye an awful spell an' me aout here

a-freezin'. What be you in sech a pucker for? Hain't you got any news?"

"You'll find it in the paper. That's what they print it for," Joe said, speaking over his shoulder with increasing volume as he started away, leaving Mrs. Lane slowly searching for the marriages and deaths as she groped her way to her door. It required some self-denial for Joe to shorten an interview with one of his most loquacious patrons, for he was of a sociable turn and enjoyed the brief opportunities for gossip that were snatched here and there along his weekly route. As he jogged along from house to house he held conversation with his horse wherein he took both parts.

"A hunderd dollars for ketchin' tew niggers! What ye think o' that, Bob? You would n't, hey? Land! you could n't. You could n't ketch a rollin' berril o' potash. I tell ye what, I'm a dum good min' ter tell an' git the hunderd dollars an' buy me a hoss 'at c'd git som'eres, sometime, an' you could hev a good time aout to parster. What if I have gin my word? Ev'ybody's mean, meaner 'n pusley, an' we've got tu be mean tu keep up aour row an' live. If you run'd away, I'd want ye back an' a feller 'at kep' ye 'ould be a dum thief. What if I would n't hommer an' hell peck ye when I got ye, it would n't be that feller's business. You think folks hain't no right tu own folks? That ain't fer me tu settle, an' hosses are a dum sight more humern tu

me 'an what niggers be. Oh, Bob, go 'long! When you s'pose we 'll git tu Uncle Aaron's?"

The two passed a cross road that led far back into the hill country beyond whose mantle of living green the helmet of Camel's Hump towered, shining like frosted silver with the first snow. The road ran beside a stretch of gray woodland with a zigzag rail fence dividing them. Joe's eye caught a glimpse of white flashing in and out, from corner to corner. It was a weasel unduly conspicuous in his too early donned winter guise, in sharp pursuit of a field mouse. The hard-pressed quarry dodged into a knot-hole in a hollow rail. The weasel ran over it, then finding itself at fault, beat back, and recovering the lost scent, began worming itself into the loophole. Joe slid off his horse, and picking up a stout stick as he ran to the fence in his peculiar galloping gait, struck and broke the back of the savage little hunter when the lithe body had wriggled itself half its length into the hole. He drew it forth and dashed the grinning, snarling head against a rail.

"'T wa'n't nothin' but a dum maouse," he said as he undulated toward his horse, complacently regarding his prize, "but I'd rather be for the maouse 'an agin him with this bloody lettle cuss, would n't you, Bob? I guess we won't help 'em ketch their niggers, seein' Hanner's dependin' on us."

As he mounted, he saw rapidly approaching from the direction in which he was going, a vehicle called

by courtesy a "light wagon" drawn by a span of swift-footed Morgans. There were three occupants of the wagon,—one, who was driving, an alert, keen-eyed man, the well-known deputy sheriff. The other two were strangers, and there was a suggestive empty seat.

"Hello, Joe," the sheriff called, pulling up as they met. "Seen or heard anything of a nigger woman an' a young un as you come along? Think hard, now, there 's a hunderd dollars' reward. That 'ould come in handy toward a-gettin' on ye a new hoss. This ol' feller 's on his last laigs. I hear 'em talkin' o' gettin' a new paper-carrier wi' a new hoss."

"A nigger woman an' a baby? Le' me see;" and he seemed to be searching his memory, but in fact he was wrestling with temptation. "Ben a-stealin', hes she?"

"Wal, yes, her laigs is a-kerryin' off this gentleman's prop'ty. Did ye stop at the Quaker ol' maid's? Like 'nough, she 's a-hidin' of 'em."

"Lord, no, the' hain't nob'dy there," Joe answered promptly. "I stopped and went in as I come along. She 's all alone. The haouse stiller'n last year's bird's-nest. Is yer nigger womern black as Tony, an' the young un yaller?"

"Yes, yes. Where did you see 'em?" The sheriff asked eagerly, already tightening his reins for a start.

"I hain't seen 'em nowheres, but come tu think

on 't, I met a feller back at the cross road, come f'm the east, he did, an' he ast me who I s'posed they was an' where I s'posed they was a-goin'. Said he met 'em 'baout four mild back, a-pikin' their poot-iest."

Joe became so interested in his fiction that he slid to the ground and stood by the near fore wheel, picking the mud from the hub as he talked. "If ye git 'em on this track will you give me suthin' for puttin' of you ontu it?"

"Suttinly, suh, suttinly, I'll give you twenty-five dollars," said one of the strangers, a cool-looking man who somehow reminded Joe of his weasel.

"Wal," Joe continued, looking straight at the three, one by one, after noting that the notch of the hub was on the upper side and the head of the linchpin directly under it, "if I was a-lookin' arter 'em, I should put right for Lindley M. Meader's. The Quakers is mostly in the same kittle."

"That's so," the sheriff assented heartily. "We've just come f'm ol' Aaron Varney's. We s'arched from suller to gerrit but did n't find no niggers, only a good place for 'em."

"You don't say! Wal, I'd go tu Lindley M.'s; it's 'baout ten mild, I cal'late." Joe slipped something into the pocket with Hannah's doughnuts and slowly wiped the wheel grease from his fingers on the seat of his trousers, with the foot of his game leg still on the hub.

The sheriff, impatient to be on the new trail, tightened the reins, and the horses started, bringing Joe's foot to the ground with a sudden jerk that almost upset him. He drew Bob from the withered roadside grasses he was cropping, remounted and went his way. Presently he drew forth something from his pocket which he tossed far afield without even looking at it. Then taking one of the doughnuts he began eating it, passing alternate mouthfuls to Bob, who turned his head aside to receive them. Joe listened to the retreating clatter of the sheriff's wagon, munching slowly for better listening, until he heard a sudden crash, followed by silence.

"I hope the' hain't none of 'em broke the' blasted necks," he ejaculated, and blowing a loud resounding blast on his horn, he dug his heels into Bob's sides.

Two hours later he rode into the back yard of Aaron Varney's great square house, setting the mixed multitude of poultry into a commotion and clamor with his melodious horn. Thereat the owner came forth, a stately man of firm countenance who looked sharply at the post rider from under the wide brim of his hat.

Joe handed him the letter, which he read at once. "Does thee know what this is about, Joseph?"

"Pooty nigh, I guess, an' my idee is you 'd better be a-hustlin' as soon as it gits dark. Hed visitors, hain't ye, Mr. Varney?"

“What makes thee think so?”

Joe went on to tell of his meeting the sheriff's party and how he had sent them off on a false scent, ending with, “I should n't wonder if they lost a linchpin er suthin'. I heard a kind of a smash as they went down the hill.”

“Why, Joseph,” said Friend Varney, his keen eyes twinkling although the corners of his mouth were drawn down to a serious expression, “I had n't any idee thee was so zealous in the cause. I hope if there was an accident, them poor, misguided men were not injured.”

“I did n't go back tu see. Hed n't no time an' git my papers delivered. Here 's yourn, “V'ice o' Freedom” an' “The Frien'” an' “Rutlan' Herald.” Like tu forgot 'em. You tell Hanner I done her arrent.”

“Farewell, Joseph, thee will be remembered in the latter day;” but the post rider was gone beyond the hearing of the kindly words.

While Joe was yet pursuing his unfinished route in the slanted light of the low sun and beguiling the time with bites of doughnut uncertainly caught as he rode along, Aaron Varney, in his empty lumber wagon drawn by a pair of well fed horses, was traveling at a smart pace on his way to Hannah Wray's. The shadows of night had long since fallen upon the earth, blotting its dun and gray to universal blackness, and house lights were going out,

one by one like setting stars, when he reached her home. As he passed a curtained window, he tapped lightly on it with the hickory handle of his rarely used whip. The curtain was drawn a little, and he whispered, "It 's Aaron come for the goods. Be spry as thee can, Hannah. Is all well so far?"

He drove cautiously into the barn, and for a time there were hushed mysterious movements, until the wagon emerged with a hogshead standing on end, behind the seat.

"Farewell, Aaron, may the Heavenly Father protect thy precious lading," Hannah said reverently. He heaved a suppressed, assenting groan as he climbed into his seat and the wagon moved with caution down the road.

A mile on his way, Aaron met three men driving a pair of jaded horses. They eyed him sharply in the faint light that shone from a sky beginning to brighten with the rising moon, but there was nothing to excite suspicion in the solitary figure and the innocent-looking hogshead. He drove on through the growing moonlight and its sudden changes of cloud shadow and unveiled radiance, alert, silent, and lonely, though with companions near. When the moon was growing pale against the sky and the shadows it cast were fading in the gray of morning he entered the yard of a tidy farmhouse. A horse neighed a welcome to the stable as the wagon entered the gloom of the neighboring shed. A pebble

cast against an upper window caused its cautious opening and the appearance of a shirted figure.

"Is that thee, David? This is Aaron an' I've brought thee a hogshead of free labor goods."

In a few moments a small man of silent, quick movements, emerged from the house. The two exchanged whispered greetings and Aaron led the way to the wagon, where they laid hold of the inverted hogshead and raising it bodily, disclosed the slave woman and child. David conducted the cramped, tired fugitives inside the house, followed by Aaron's portly form, where they were welcomed with as gentle cordiality as if the hostess had expected their early call.

"Wal, Sary, here 's Aaron agin, with some more stolen prop'ty. Pooty Quaker you are, Aaron, stealin' them poor Southerners' goods." His twinkling eyes and firm set mouth expressed a love of fun and adventure perhaps more than humanitarian sentiment. "I'm a good min' to report you to the Monthly Meetin', Aaron. Some o' the ol' blue bellies 'd turn ye out o' meetin' if they got wind o' your goin's on. Wal, I s'pose I'll hafter help ye smuggle the goods into Canerdy. Feed 'em an' stow 'em away, Sary," and the dusky passengers again passed out of sight in another station of the dark, wide-reaching, many-branched road that stretched from the sunlit Southern fields to Canadian snows.

The post rider jogged leisurely southward on his return trip with no object but to get home and be ready for the next journey over the old route. Bob might take his time now without detriment to the newspaper service, so Joe tied him to Hannah Wray's hitching-post and went in to learn how her affairs had prospered.

After their interchange of information she said, "And now I think thee said thee wanted a new horse."

"Yis, marm."

"Well, I've been thinking about that. I'm told thee 's a careful hand with horses and I've a notion to let thee take my three-year-old bay mare and break her to the saddle. Thee can turn thy horse out in my rowan to be used a little perhaps if James needs him. How will that suit thee?"

"That 's tew good, marm," Joe said, his pale eyes actually shining with surprise and delight. "But I guess I c'n manage the mare if you want me tu try it."

The colt, being intelligent and good tempered, took kindly to the saddle and saddle-bags and to Joe on top of them. He, riding away the happiest man in the country, was soon engaged in friendly converse with her as he had lately been with her predecessor. He explained to her all strange objects on the road and gradually accustomed her to the sound of the horn blown just above her sensitive

ears. Thus traveling they met the Sheriff engaged in better business than when last met.

"Hello, Joe," he hailed, after recognizing the postman on the new horse.

"Hello, Mr. Barnes. You got that twenty-five dollars for me?" Joe asked, playing with a wisp of the mare's mane.

"Twenty-five your grandmother!" said the sheriff scornfully. "Drove fifteen mild, lickaty split arter nothin' an' back agin, besides a wheel comin' off an' pooty nigh breakin' all our necks."

"You don't say. That's all killin' bad. I was a-lottin' on that twenty-five dollars."

"Say, where did you get your hoss, Joe?" critically studying the new mount.

"This 'ere mare?" Joe asked, apparently then first aware he was not astride old Bob. "Oh, she hain't nothin' but a green cult Mis' Wray wanted me for tu take an' ride a spell tu saddle break an' git waywise."

"O-oh!" The sheriff's long drawn exclamation comprehended many expressions. Running his eyes over the insignificant figure before him, his newly awakened admiration took form in words. "You can't allers tell by the looks of a toad how fur he'll jump. I swear you be an innercent lookin' cuss."

Quite different were Hannah Wray's thoughts of the post rider, as she sat at her kitchen window and

musingly looked out on the peaceful autumnal landscape: "What poor, feeble instruments our Heavenly Father will sometimes strengthen for His use!"

THE PURIFICATION OF CORNBURY

ONE September morning, sixty years ago, the three selectmen of Cornbury were holding an informal council in front of the kitchen door of Squire Dana. He, a tall, athletic man, with a strongly moulded and not unkindly face, stood on the ground, resting one foot on the hub of a vehicle called by courtesy a light wagon, in which sat, elevated high above him, the second and third members of the triumvirate. One of them, a short, important-looking man, held the reins of a fat Morgan mare that stood quite undisturbed by his meditative flicking of the grass with the woodchuck-skin lash of the hickory-handled whip. The other, a lean, mild-faced person, picked nervously at the hair of the buffalo skin that temporarily upholstered the wagon seat, while he listened to the conversation of his associates.

"The long an' short on 't is," said he who held the reins, giving a sharp cut at a late-blooming dandelion, "folks is a-gittin' so stirred up abaout them a-livin' together the way they du 'at we've got tu raout 'em aout."

"Wal, I s'pose so," Squire Dana admitted reluctantly, taking his foot from the hub as he drew his knife from his pocket, picked up a chip that

had strayed from the woodshed into the neatness of the yard, and began to whittle ; “ but I swan it goes agin my grain tu tackle a woman.”

“ That ’s jest it,” said Captain Fay, the rotund second selectman. “ All aour women folks is tur’bly riled up abaout it, an’ for my part, I’d a good deal druther hev a bresh wi’ that ’ere one woman an’ done with it ’an tu hev all the women in taown a-buzzin’ araound aour ears the hul endurin’ time.”

“ Why not set the constable arter ’em ? ” Deacon Palmer suggested. “ Seems ’s ’ough ’t was more his business ’n what it is aourn.”

Squire Dana shook his head in slow dissent. “ No, ’t would make the taown expense. I guess we’ll hafter ’tend tu it.”

Mrs. Dana, hovering near the open door, conducted her housework in such unusual silence that her alert ears caught the drift of the conversation, to which she felt it her duty, as a member of the Moral Reform Society and the wife of the first selectman, to add her voice for the quick removal of a blot on the town’s good name.

“ Good-mornin’, Captain. Good-mornin’, Deacon,” she said, stepping out on to the stoop, the welcome smile on her genial face hardening to fitting severity as she asked, “ Was you a-talkin’ abaout that Lem Tyler an’ that woman ? It’s a disgrace tu the hul town an’ every respectable woman in it tu have them mis’able creeturs a-livin’ the way they

du. It's a burnin' shame, an' I say if the selec'men hain't got enough spunk tu take a holt an' turn 'em aou' door, the women 'll haftu."

"Sartainly, we're a-cal'latin' tu, Mis' Dany," Captain Fay answered, with prompt decision; "but you see we want tu ketch 'em aou' door if we possibly can, an' then we can set their stuff aou' door an' not hev no rumpus."

"That's it ezackly," her husband assented emphatically; and Deacon Palmer added acquiescence without taking his eyes from an unfamiliar prairie bur he was plucking at in the buffalo hair.

"Wal, if that's what you want, he's gone away," declared Mrs. Dana. "He went off up the road whilst aour folks was a-milkin', an' I hain't seen him go back. If you three men can't git one woman an' one young one aout of a haouse, the taown hed better elect a new board."

"I guess they won't heftu, Mis' Dany," Captain Fay said confidently. "Say, Square, if we're a-goin' tu-day tu lay that new road, why can't we take in this 'ere job as we go along? 'T won't be no gret of a chore. Come, put on your kut, an' git right in here."

"You come in an' let me put a clean dicky on, Mr. Dany," said his wife, and she bustled indoors, presently reappearing with the supplementary collar and bosom, with which she proceeded to invest her husband, while he elevated his chin, pursed his

lips, shut his eyes, and held his breath, in dread of pins. Then she brought his second-best blue coat and his black fur hat, in which he permitted himself to be arrayed without audible protest.

"There! naow you look more like payin' your respec's to a lady," she said, after a brief, comprehensive inspection that lingered with least approval on trousers and boots.

He climbed to the seat, and the three drove away, watched by Mrs. Dana till they were hidden by the copse of crimson sumac at the road.

"Wal, I only hope their spunk 'll hold aout," she soliloquized as the apex of the pyramid of three bell-crowned hats disappeared, and she re-entered to a brisk and noisy resumption of her interrupted labors. "I wish 't I was a man a spell: I'd drive 'em aout o' the taown. But then, I s'pose if I was a man I should be jest like the rest on 'em."

Captain Fay drove the Morgan mare at a pace that soon brought him and his associates to a house of such forlorn exterior and surroundings that one would have thought it untenanted, if the smoke crawling from the crumbling chimney and the heap of freshly gathered wood at the door had not betokened occupancy. Naked scars where the wind had torn shingles from the sagging mossy roof; broken windows; lichen-scaled clapboards dropping away from their places, disclosing raw strips of un-

weathered boarding like unhealed wounds; the dying lilac-tree, hedged around by its own sprouts, beside the unused front door; the lilies and peonies running wild with a vagabond company of weeds; the untrodden, weed-grown path to the ruinous barn; the curbless well, and its broken sweep lying beside it, with the leaky bucket still attached to the pole and chain, — all told of a house abandoned by its owners and given over to careless tenants.

“They run a pretty good fire,” said the Squire, observing the smoke.

“Yes, wood a-plenty for the picking up,” said Captain Fay; and then, casting a critical eye along a rail fence which had sunken somewhat below lawful height, “Guess Davis’s fences hes begun tu winter-kill a’ready.”

“I don’t see what in tunket Davis ever let the critturs in here fur!” Squire Dana said impatiently. “Folks ortu be more pa’tic’lar. My tenant hausen has ben empty more ’n three months ’cause I can’t find the right sort of a family tu let int’ it.”

“Wal, mebbey Davis’ll git a day’s work naow an’ agin, an’ that’s better ’n nothin’,” said Palmer. “Shh! there’s the woman naow. Say, she hain’t bad-lookin’.”

A dark-haired, dark-eyed woman, comely in spite of a look too worn for her years, which were not more than twenty-five, and neatly though poorly clad, came out at the side door with a pail in her

hand. She halted a moment to cast a startled glance upon the visitors alighting at the broken gate, and then hurried to the well and hastily lowered the bucket by its clumsy attachment.

Squire Dana's first impulse was to help her; but while he hesitated she drew up the dribbling bucket with swift, strong hands, and emptying what remained of its wasted contents into the pail, sped back to the house without bestowing another look on the strangers at the gate, though their chief called out:—

“Hol' on a minute, won't ye, marm? There, Fay, if you had n't 'a' ben forever a-hitchin' your hoss, we might 'a' run in ahead on her.”

“Wal, what hendered you an' Palmer?” the Captain asked, chuckling as he joined his companions. “I could tend the mare.”

“Say,” said Palmer, edging toward the wagon, “le' 's go an' lay that road, an' leave this 'ere job for the constable. It hain't aourn.”

“What! flunk aout naow an' hev aour women folks givin' us Hail Columby?” asked the Squire. “No, siree, I've ben hetcheled all I want tu be. Come on.”

With that he led the way up the path, but with as little stomach as the others for the unpleasant duty. He knocked at the door where the woman had gone in; but there was no response, though he could hear her stepping lightly across the floor.

He tried the latch and found it fastened; then knocked more loudly. A window over the door was opened, and the woman's voice descended:—

“What d' you want?”

There was a little penthouse roof jutting out over the door, and the Squire backed from beneath it that he might see the speaker. Her face was flushed and defiant, and beside her, peering over the window ledge, was the curious, scared face of a fair-haired little girl.

“We want tu come in,” he said, answering her question as he looked up at her.

“Wal, you can't, 'cause Mr. Tyler's gone away, an' he tol' me not tu let nob'dy in till he come back.”

“Oh, come naow, what's the use? We're the selec'men, ye know. You'd better let us in.”

“I can't help it if you're the hul taown. I can't let you in, I can't!”

“Wal, then we'll hafter bust in the door, for we're a-comin' in, one way or 'nother,” said the Squire, taking a more decided tone. “Fay, you an' Palmer fetch a rail off'en the fence.” He turned away, and stood with his arms akimbo watching the somewhat slow execution of the order by his companions.

The two figures disappeared from the window; there was a clatter of stove furniture, a sound of pouring water, and the woman reappeared at her

coign of vantage as the storming party advanced, carrying a stout rail as a battering ram.

"I give you good warnin'," she said, with her voice higher pitched than before. "If you come anigh, you 'll git scalt."

There was a reek of steam about her, and as she spoke she lifted a large dipper of hot water from a pail and rested it on the window sill.

"Sho, she won't dast tu!" said the Squire contemptuously as his comrades hesitated. "Come on. Let drive nighest tu the latch an' bust it."

They advanced more briskly, and she, drawing back the dipper, called out, "Ta' care, or you 'll ketch it!" and then flung out the contents at them.

The shot fell short of the bearers of the battering ram, and the Squire dodged under shelter of the narrow pent roof and flattened himself against the door, while the charge overshot him and dribbled from the eaves.

"Gosh, hain't she a spunky one!" he exclaimed, in a burst of admiration that exceeded his vexation. "Come on, naow. Quick afore she gits loaded up agin."

But before the order could be executed another volley descended upon the assaulting party, who dropped the rail and retired precipitately; Captain Fay nursing a scalded finger, and Deacon Palmer, whose hat had fallen off within range of the battery, striving to express his feelings within the

limits of such mild profanity as a church member might be allowed.

"Wal, you be smart fellers," the Squire commented. "Naow, if I'd hed a holt o' that 'ere rail" —

"You can hev a holt o' my sheer on 't an' welcome," the Captain generously offered, as he alternately inspected and blew his injured finger.

"Mine tew, gol darn it!" the Deacon declared, venturing near the danger line with a pole, and attempting to insert the end of it in the crown of his hat. Before he could effect a rescue down came a scalding shower, deluging the upturned beaver and barely missing its owner.

The Squire made a determined attack upon the door, kicking lustily at the panels and throwing his shoulder with all his might against it; but it would not yield, and he desisted when a dash of hot water caught his foot thrust beyond the shelter of the door's hood. Direct attack did not seem to promise success, so he sallied out to his comrades beyond the fire of the garrison, and began plotting strategy.

"We wanter kinder squirmish 'raound till she gits her ammernition used up," said he; "when that 's gone, I'll resk her claws."

"I do' know 'baout that, the darn' she-cat!" Deacon Palmer remarked dubiously; but he had no thought of raising the siege now, for his fighting

blood was up. "I'm a-goin' tu make another try for that 'ere hat."

"Yes, du, an' me an' Captain 'll make b'lieve go at the door agin."

The Deacon clawed at the hat with the pole at arm's length, the others made a show of attack with the rail, and all drew frequent fire from the enemy, ineffectual but for a further drenching of the hat, which the owner at last secured and hung on a stake to dry.

"My sakes!" he groaned, as he contemplated its limp and bedraggled condition. "I do' know what in time Mis' Palmer 'll say when she sees that 'ere hat. I've kep' it as good as new for fifteen year, an' naow jest look at it! Looks as if I'd took a head dive int' the river an' forgot tu take it off."

"If I was you, I'd ruther hev her see it 'an tu hev her hear what you said. Pretty nigh cussin' for a deacon."

"That I can keep tu myself. The hat I can't."

"Wal, you want tu keep that 'ere tu show your gran'childern when you tell 'em abaout the capture o' Fort Davis," said the Captain.

"It hain't captured yet."

"Wal, it's a-goin' tu be," said the Squire confidently. "I can hear her scrapin' the dipper in the bottom of the kittle, an' her ammernition's 'baout spent. Le' 's draw her fire agin."

The feint excited a feeble volley; another brought

no response, and it became evident that the amazon's ammunition was exhausted. The besiegers now advanced boldly to the assault. The door yielded to the first vigorous stroke of the battering ram, and victory at last perched on the banner of the selectmen.

"Wal, marm," said the Squire, in his severest official voice, addressing the woman who stood sullenly defiant at the farther side of the scantily furnished kitchen, with one hand on the head of the frightened child, "you ortu be 'shamed o' yourself a-scaldin' taown officers."

"'Shamed!" she flared up indignantly. "I sh'd think you was the ones tu be 'shamed! Three men a-tacklin' a woman an' a little girl an' bustin' in doors! Scald you! I wish I c'd bile you!"

"No daoubt on 't, marm, but we won't waste no time a-passin' compliments," and the Squire turned away. "Come, men, le' 's git these 'ere things aout."

The victors hurried as if in fear of relenting before the disagreeable duty was accomplished, and soon set the poor and meagre furniture out of doors, yet with a degree of care they felt was due to its valiant defender, who now, without further attempt at useless resistance, went out, leading the child by the hand. Then they fastened the door, and clambered out through a window and went their way, leaving the woman and child standing in silent,

dazed despair among their unshrined household gods.

"Gosh! I do' know but I sh'd feel as mean 'f I'd ben stealin' sheep an' got ketched at it." The Squire broke the silence in which the selectmen held self-communion as they drove along the highway. His associates grunted a sympathetic response, and the Deacon ran his hand tenderly over the blistered hat crown.

"I do' know what the critturs live on," the Captain remarked. "All the victuals I see was a bag o' 'taters I fetched aout, an' the' wa'n't more 'n a ha' bushel o' them."

As the Squire's wife set her kitchen in order and put the finishing touches to its neatness (for she was just then, as she expressed it, "aout of a girl, an' duin' my own work"), she often went to the door and looked down the road, wondering what progress the town fathers were making, and with what thoroughness they would perform their duty. No hopeful sign was given her out of the haze of smoke with which a shift of wind to the northward was thickening the atmosphere, from some distant forest fire, and chilling it with what seemed an unnatural breath, since it choked one with the odor of burnt leaves, and even bore their charred and ashy shapes, wavering as silently as ghosts of dead leaves, in long slants to the ground. The sumac

copse shone like a red flame in the blue mist that blurred near objects, and blotted out all beyond the middle distance.

“I p’sume tu say they won’t du nothin’,” she said to herself. “Square Dany’s tew soft-hearted, an’ the others is afeard o’ maddin’ someb’dy nuther tu vote agin ’em. My! I wish ’t women voted; we ’d show ’em which side their bread was buttered on. Wal, I’ll see if I can spin part of a knot ’fore it’s time tu git dinner a-goin’.”

She drew the big wheel, with its white saddle of rolls, from the corner, and set it to humming its musical song while she stepped back and forth beside it; now twirling the wheel swiftly in one way, now slowly the other. After a time the merrier sound of the kettle and the clatter of dinner-getting succeeded the noise of the wheel; then the dinner horn sounded a note pleasant to the ear of the hired man wrestling with the plumed ranks of ripe corn, when, sticking his sickle into the last-vanquished shock, he declared an hour’s truce. When he had resumed hostilities, and Mrs. Dana, leaving the table uncleared, was assisting digestion by a perusal of the *Advocate of Moral Reform*, she was disturbed by a timid knock at the door.

Opening it, she was confronted by the unfamiliar faces of a young woman and a little girl. Both bore traces of recent tears, and the child’s breath was still broken by an irrepressible sob.

"I would n't 'a' bothered you, ma'am, but 'Mandy was cryin' for somethin' tu eat, an' there wa'n't nothin' tu give her." The young woman spoke in a soft voice, and her dark eyes had a pleading expression that a harder heart than Mrs. Dana's could not have resisted.

"Hungry, is she? Why, good land, come right in. I guess you be, tew, if you hed n't nothin' for her. Set up to the stove. It's turned raound real cold, an' the fire feels good." She put chairs for her guests, and gave the fire a hospitable punch, and set herself to rearranging the table; piling dirty plates, cups, and saucers, clawing the rumpled cloth into place, brushing the crumbs with one hand into the other, and bustling to the pantry for a fresh supply of bread and the indispensable pie.

"I don't want you tu take no trouble," the woman protested, looking apprehensively at the preparations. "I — I hain't no money tu pay you, but I can spin a spell for you," her eyes dwelling on the wheel.

"Good land, I don't want no pay, an' I hain't goin' tu take no trouble," Mrs. Dana declared. "Trav'lin' fur? Goin' tu see some o' your folks, I p'sume tu say? The little girl hain't yourn? Some related, mebby, but she don't favor you a mite. Mebby you hain't merried?"

It was not Mrs. Dana's habit to wait for answers

to her questions, but she did now, while the visitor, with downcast eyes, shook her head.

"If you 'd ha' come an hour sooner, you might ha' eat a hot dinner with us," the hostess went on. "But there 's enough left, such as it is, thank goodness. There wa'n't nob'dy but me an' the hired man tu dinner. My husband, he's gone off on taown business tu-day. He's fust selec'man, an' they've gone off 'mongst 'em a-transactin' business. Naow, then, you an' she take right off your bunnets an' shawls, an' set up tu the table."

The visitor arose hastily, and gasped in a scared voice: "No, no! Give 'Mandy a piece o' bread an' butter in her hand, an' we'll go. We can't stop! Oh no, we can't stop!"

"Be you crazy? I sh'd like to know what 's the reason you can't stop an' eat?"

"Oh, I can't," the woman protested. "We must go right off."

"Wal, then, you hain't a-goin', an' that child hain't a-goin' afore she's eat a meal o' victuals! Naow tell me your trouble," Mrs. Dana said, in a tone so masterful that, aided by the entreating, hungry eyes of the little girl, it compelled compliance.

"If you've got tu know," the stranger answered half defiantly, "your man an' the other selec'men come over there," indicating the direction with a sidewise motion of the head; "an' Mr. Tyler, he

was gone, an' they was comin' in, an' I hove hot water ontu 'em! Yes, I did. But they broke in the door, an' they sot all the things aout door an' fastened us aout; an', oh dear, I do' know what 's goin' tu be become of us! I wish 't I was dead!" With that she broke down utterly, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Wal, I never!" Mrs. Dana gasped, her breath so completely taken away by the relation that she was obliged to sit down to await its return, burying beneath her ample form the crumpled pages of the "Advocate" where it lay on the cushion into which she sank. The blankness of her face gradually hardened into an expression of proper severity; her gaping mouth closed tightly, then opened again as speech came with renewed breath. "So you 're that woman, be you? You don't look like her. I would n't ha' thought it of you. Haow ever come you tu du so?"

No answer came but sobs from the hidden face. Impelled by an impulse of motherly pity, Mrs. Dana laid her hand gently on the bowed head, and said as gently, "Don't you believe you'd better tell me all abaout your trouble?"

Then the woman began in a broken voice that grew steadier as she went on: "I was took sick at the place where I was a-workin', an' they was a-goin' to throw me on t' the taown, but Mr. an'

Mis' Tyler took me in an' kep' me till I got well ; an' then Mis' Tyler, she took sick, an' there wa'n't nob'dy tu ta' care of her only me, an' so I did till she died ; an' then there wa'n't nob'dy tu keep haouse for him, an' so I stayed an' kep' a-stayin', like a fool, but I could n't seem tu help it, they 'd ben so good tu me. An' everybody turned agin us, an' he could n't git no work, an' so we come away from there an' got in here, but it's jes' as bad ; an' this mornin' he started off for Brinkford lookin' for work, an' them men come an' turned us aout, an' now I do' know what we be goin' tu du ! Oh dear, I wish 't I was dead ! ”

Her sobs broke out afresh, and Mrs. Dana waited a little before she asked, “ Why wa'n't you merried ? ”

“ He wanted tu, but I would n't so soon after she died, an' so we kep' livin' along ; an' he said 't wa'n't nob'dy's business 's long 's we sot so by one 'nother as we did.”

The moral reformer of Cornbury, suddenly recollecting neglected hospitality, said in a gentler voice : “ It don't signify, a-lettin' folks starve afore my face an' eyes ! Now set up tu the table. Yes, you 've got tu, an' the little girl 'll set right by, an' help her an' yourself ; ” and having seated her guests at the table, she busied herself in ministering to them while she silently pondered and cast frequent searching glances up the road.

"When was you expectin' 'Mandy's pa 'd be comin' back?"

"Any time 'most."

"Well, I want tu ketch him when he comes along. An' naow, if you won't eat nothin' more, you may spin a little while if you are a mind tu. You was sayin' you could, wa'n't you? What did you say your name was?"

"Roxy," the woman answered, taking her place at the wheel with the alacrity of accustomed use.

Mrs. Dana watched her, at first doubtfully, then with growing admiration of her agile and skillful movements; and when she had examined the yarn with critical eye and touches, she declared: "I never see nob'dy that could spin sprier an' better. I could n't myself. There, naow, you sit daown an' rest. You need n't spin no more. Sis, is n't that your pa?"

She hastened out to intercept a man whose form seemed to acquire substance as he drew near, as if materializing out of the blue haze. He yielded to her entreaty, which was as much a command. His heavy, good-humored face was blank. While he was wiping his dusty boots on the dooryard knot-grass, she was further gratified by the arrival of the selectmen.

"Hitch your hoss, and come right in, Captain, you an' the Deacon. Oh yes, you got tu. I want

you tu," she urged against all excuses, and getting in the rear of her guests left no way open to them but the one she desired them to take. Her husband walked behind her, dumbly wondering at her, and went to the depths of speechless astonishment with his colleagues when he found their late antagonist installed in his own kitchen.

"Square Dany," his wife began, without any detail of explanation, "these folks wants tu git merried right off, an' I want you tu merry 'em. Stan' right up here, naow, Lem'wil, an' you, Roxy, take a holt o' his han'. There, naow, Square, perform the ceremony."

The matrimonial candidates obediently did as told, but the Squire protested :

"Why, Mis' Dany, I never merried a couple in my life."

"Wal, if you 've ben Justice o' the Peace tew hul year, goin' on three, an' do' know haow tu merry folks, the taown 'd better 'lect someb'dy else in your place," she said, in a tone that put him upon his mettle; and since the eyes of his fellow fathers were upon him, he manfully essayed the performance of the unaccustomed duty.

"Du you, j'intly an' severally, solemnly promise, in the presence o' these witnesses, tu take one 'nother for husban' an' wife, for better or wus, be the same more or less, an' promise well an' truly tu perform the same without fear or favor of any

man — or woman ?” he added, with a happy afterthought.

Lemuel Tyler responded with a hearty affirmative, and Roxy bashfully nodded, as the mistress of ceremonies, with a ready hand, would perforce have obliged her to, had she hesitated. Then the Squire declared, in his best official voice : “ By the authority in me vested by the State of Vermont, I du pronounce you man an’ wife, tu hev an’ tu hol’ till death du you part. Asy Dany, Justice of the Peace. — There, I guess that ’ll hold, won’t it ? ” he asked, turning to his associates as he wiped his perspiring face.

“ I don’t see no flaw in the indictment,” Captain Fay admitted ; “ but hain’t you goin’ tu make no remarks ? It ’s usuil on sech occasions.”

“ Wal, yes, I s’pose it is.” The Squire pondered as he cleared his throat for further speech. “ I will say tu you, Mr. Tyler, that ef you want tu keep peace in the fam’ly you ’d better du putty nigh as Mis’ Tyler wants you tu ; an’ tu you, Mis’ Tyler, not tu want onreasonable ; an’ tu both on ye, if one gits sassy, for t’ other not to sass back, — in the words of the poet, —

‘ Ef one throws fire an’ the other water,
Peace will reign in every quarter.’ ”

“ S’posin’ it’s hot water ? ” the Captain asked, as he tended his forefinger.

"I do' know 's I 've got anything more tu remark," said the Squire.

"Naow set daown, all on ye," his wife commanded, as she bustled into the pantry, where her voice, pitched in a high key, could still be heard: "The' wa'n't no time for preperation, so the' hain't no weddin' cake; but the' 's nut cakes an' cheese a-plenty, an' punkin pie, which is good if I did make it." These she presently brought and pressed upon the company.

Captain Fay picked up the crumpled "Advocate" from the chair in which he was about to seat himself, and studying the title a moment remarked, "Mis' Dany, your Moral Reform paper looks as if it hed ben sot daown on."

Without heeding him she went on: "Naow, ef you hain't no objections, Square Dany, I 'll blow the horn for Hiram, an' he an' Lem'wil can hitch ontu the hay riggin', an' go an' git the things an' put 'em in your tenant haouse. You ben wantin' a good stubbed man in 't, which Lem'wil looks tu be, an' Roxy is the beater tu spin, as I know."

As Squire Dana parted with his associates at the hitching-post he spoke only one word, — "Gosh!"

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